



## **Tales From Neibolt by ErraGray**

**Category:** IT

**Genre:** Horror, Supernatural

**Language:** English

**Status:** In-Progress

**Published:** 2019-04-15 03:24:56

**Updated:** 2019-11-06 06:48:56

**Packaged:** 2019-12-12 05:36:13

**Rating:** M

**Chapters:** 8

**Words:** 24,831

**Publisher:** [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

**Summary:** Various stories of Its victims at different time periods. No romance, just It hunting and terrorizing the sheep around Its Derry killing pen. Maturin will make the occasional appearance along with the occasional Loser.

# 1. Amelia

## Amelia-2016

Amelia, a short stocky woman in her early forties, stumbled along the road, her dark brown hair stringy and obscuring her face as she kept her eyes on her phone. The moonlight reflected the glass bottle of Bob Gray beer she clutched as she madly texted her friend Jennifer. She was wearing a red and white striped sweater a few sizes too big, the edges falling over her fingers as she typed and ripped jeans. Both stained with some unidentified substance. Jennifer had left the party early and was pissed off with her. Apologies would need to be made the next day, no doubt. Since being all over your friend's boyfriend wasn't acceptable behavior. But hey, she was wasted. Jennifer had to know at this point Amelia was unpredictable when intoxicated.

'Fuck u.' was the last exchange from Jennifer.

Amelia kicks a tin can out of her path with her red heel, observing her surroundings. She was coherent enough to see where she was now; on Neibolt Street.

*Aw, yes. The haunted street.*

At least that's what they say. They being the good townfolk of Derry. Boring ol' Derry. Boring until you scratch the surface. The myths surrounding the dilapidated old house that loomed over the neighborhood like a bad smell had been around since at least the 1700s. The well house, it was called. Her parents, who had been cultists, had told her the tales. They had been obsessed with the place. Along with a strange church with oddly angular architecture that had been built not far away.

The one with that fairy door that lead down into the sewers.

After they had suddenly decided to leave the town and took her, moving clear across the country, there had been no more mention of the house or the church. After they both passed, she'd returned to live with the her mother's parents. Although when they were still alive, they had been against her returning to the sleepy little town. But, no

other relatives were around, all dead or moved to unknown locations.

The only other option was to come to come back to Derry.

It had been an adjustment. She didn't know them. At all. But they had been so kind, she wondered why her mother had cut herself off from them. Personality differences maybe. But she was happy, even if their house had reeked of moth balls and they listened to old jazz records. John Coltrane and Miles Davis being their favorites.

Making friends had been even harder. Her friendship with Jennifer was strained at best. They's been best friends since high school, they were bonded. Both had had cultists for parents, and there was an understanding between them. Nobody else really understood what they had gone through.

Of course, this latest stunt at the party would need patching over.

She comes to a stop in front of the well house's old wrought iron fence. Sunflowers spurted out of the ground around the place, giving it the only touch of lightness in a blanket of rotting wood and grass clearly starved for water. She cocked her head at the door. She had heard, from only a select few, mainly other children of cult members that there was a clown. A clown that was sometimes seen at Neibolt. Always seen at times of disaster, kind of like mothman.

An idea occurred to her, a completely insane idea. She was buzzed and feeling a little reckless.

*Fuck it. Let's see if it's true.*

She marches towards the front door, tossing aside her bottle of booze. It hits the ground with a clink as she stands before the door. Charily, she reaches for the knob and turns it, the aged metal squeaking.

*Let's find out what's here. I'm not afraid of some clown.*

She makes her way inside, hitting the flashlight app on her phone. When the light flickers on, she sees the inside matches the out; creepy as Hell. Spiderwebs spread throughout every crevice, a fireplace emblazoned with 'Good Cheer, Good Friends' and the creaky old staircase leading up to the second floor. Dare she walk up them?

They don't look stable. The place also had a weird odor, musty mixed with dirt and leaves. She lets out a sharp yelp as she spots an abnormally large spider crawling along the railing.

Sitting cross-legged on the floor, she starts. "If there is something in this house. A spirit...or whatever....what the fuck ever..." she declares, pausing to cough into her forearm. "Hey, come out. Come on man. I wanna know if you're real." she slurs.

*Fuck this is stupid. What am I doing?*

*Bam!*

"What the Hell?" she jumps up, almost falling over as she untangles her legs. "What is that?"

"Helloooo *Amelia*." comes a deep voice from nowhere.

Her mouth gapes, her breath visible as a cold chill envelopes her. It was a hot summer night, such a thing shouldn't happen. She fumbles with the light on her phone. "Oh, God, oh God,"

"Your God can't help." came that same disembodied voice. Mocking, menacing.

"Wha-" Her eyes darted around the room. "Who's there? Who are you?"

"You *knoooooow*."

Her flashlight now goes out completely. "No!" she yells, as she manages to flick it on again. Just as she did, she saw it, the light illuminating the features of a clown. Standing right across from her. A neutral look on his face.

Amelia stumbles back, terror creeping through her bones. "W-Who..." she stutters. Just then, her light goes out again, with a shake of her phone its shining once more. Lifting it up to where the clown was standing, she lets out a scream.

No clown, this time, instead her father.

A man who was dead and buried was standing before her.

He's holding up a bloodied knife, pieces of skin falling off his face, a maniacal grin stretching across his features.

"Milly, don't scream! Don't you wanna play?" he laughs, charging at her, knife waving. She backs up shrieking, trying to dodge the blade. Just then, she feels hands grab her from behind. Cold, callused hands. She whirls around and sees her mother, only she's looking like she did the last time she'd seen her; in her casket, same soft pink dress with the white pearls. Others proceed to come out of the various dark corners of the room, familiar faces from a past long ago, both adult and children alike. Zombies, with dead listless eyes and pale gray skin. Their moans drowning out Amelia's hysterical screaming.

She dashes for the door, only to see its blocked by more of them, swaying, limping, reaching out for her and grasping her sweater.

Tying her down to a table with old ropes, they stand circling her as tears stream down her cheeks, dripping onto the tabletop as she turns her head in the direction of a figure, much taller than the others, his abnormally large head topped with blazing orange locks.

The clown again. He stands silent, his yellow-red eyes boring through her. "Amelia," his voice is rasping. "Welcome. You wanted to see me. Here I am," he gives a little chuckle. "You weren't expecting it, were you?"

Amelia shakes her head languidly, the clown becoming a blur through her stinging watering eyes. "No, no, no..." she wails, as she squirms, gaining her composure long enough to focus her gaze on the clown. He smiles as if sensing her emotions. She closes her eyes, hoping this is a nightmare that will end. However, when she opens them...

It's Jennifer. Standing there, giving a disgusted head shake. "You treat your friends like shit. Or rather friend. I have been nothing but good to you."

Amelia sucks in her lips, holding back a sob. "I'm sorry."

And in the blink of an eye, the clown is back."Beautiful fear..." he whispers as he calmly watches as his minions tear her to shreds, her screams cut off as her mother tears into her neck.

*It feasts. The girl's terror had flavored her flesh delectably. The best It had had in a long time. Truth is, It had seen her passing by, and had influenced her to come to the house. It recognized her as one of the Offerings; children sacrificed to It by the human cultists who viewed It as a God. Aware of Its presence, the'd built a church in honor of It and regularly sent children down to their deaths. However, this girl's parents balked at her being chosen to be sacrificed and had instead fled from town.*

*But now It has claimed what It was promised.*

*The fact that so many were willing to offer up their own offspring was amusing to It. Humans had a thirst for both power and answers to the unknown. That usually lead to their own demise. Their feeble minds would be unable to comprehend what lies beyond. One of the reasons that Its natural form left them either dead, or completely mad.*

As It ate, It hears tiny 'pinging' sounds. It stands and approaches a light in the center of the room, the bells of Its suit jingling. It's the girl's phone. Its golden eyes scanning the incoming texts from the one named Jennifer.

'Where r u?' I'm worried.'

Pennywise, mouth smeared with blood, grins as It types a response.

'at neibolt. come and get me.'

## 2. Alison

### Alison-1989

The school buses were parked along the road in front of Derry High School, just as all the children were piling out the front doors, anxious to get home, jumping on their bikes and skateboards. All of them in clear anticipation of Summer vacation, as it was only a few weeks away.

Alison, one of the drivers, stood leaning her lithe frame against the bus she'd been hired to drive only several months earlier, her long glossy black hair pulled into a loose low-hanging ponytail, her arms folded as she watched some remaining children still meandering in the school's courtyard. She adjusts the blue baseball cap she had on as she gazed over at the sign just outside the building; 'remember the curfew' written in bold ebony lettering. The number of missing in the area lead to the town being put on surveillance. While the excitement of Summer was building, the only damper was the ever-growing number of mysterious disappearances.

So far only one student had made his way onto her bus, carrying a small boom box blasting Technotronic's 'Pump Up The Jam.'

She sighs as she sees four foul-mouthed and obnoxious boys come into view where she was standing. The Bower's Gang, they were once referred to, although she was unsure of which one was Bowers himself. Possibly the one with the mullet and the angry eyes.

They were tormenting a younger boy who seemed to be a favorite target of theirs, snatching his black kippah off his nest of light brown curls.

"Hey, give it back!" Stanley cries out, reaching up as Patrick held it high above his head.

"Take it," he taunts, dangling it in front of Stanley. "C'mon faggot!"

He tosses it to Vic like one would toss a frisbee, who in turn passes it to Belch, as it reaches Henry's hands, he slowly steps up to Stanley,

his slightly beady eyes narrowing, pinching the kippah between his thumb and index.

"You want it?" he growls, his breath only a few inches from Stan's face, before he suddenly freezes, taking notice of something just beyond the younger boy's shoulder, his eye sockets now widened, like a deer caught in headlights.

A cop car suddenly pulls up to the other side of the road across from the school. The driver's side window rolls down and Oscar Bowers glowers at his hooligan son, resting his elbow on the door, not uttering a single word. Alison cannot make out his expression behind his dark sunglasses.

Henry stands watching, the air shifting to something more tense, as both father and son engage in an unspoken exchange, before Henry shoves the kippah at Stanley's chest, nearly knocking the boy down.

"Take it." he mutters before motioning for his sycophants to follow him, sending a passing glance back at the older Bowers.

Stanley is subsequently approached by three other boys, with one audibly saying, "F-f-f-fuck B-b-b-Bowers."

The smallest one, a hyper boy sporting a fanny pack, gazes at Alison, a look of apprehension.

*He's the one with the over-protective mother. She'd heard one of the other students mention it before.*

*Scrawny sad little thing.*

Alison turns her attention back to the bullies as they make their leave. The appearance of Officer Bowers had altered their personalities. They became quiet, somber as they all jump into a blue Trans Am, speeding off down the road and vanishing around the corner.

*What a disgusting boy. All of them.*

*Maybe I should lure them in next.*

Yes, upon her arrival in Derry from the neighboring Bangor-wanting a change after her divorce- she'd been given a special welcome from someone-or something-she didn't know. First hearing the whispers drifting out through the kitchen sink in her modest new home.

*We are Legion, the voices chanted.*

It wasn't until she'd been drawn to that old strange house on Neibolt Street that she'd made the discovery; a clown. Pennywise, he called himself, that lived beneath Derry, that was feeding on the town's children, along with the occasional adult. Although children were his preference. This thing had promised her a wealth of rewards if she'd aid him in his hunting. With one touch, eternal life could be hers. Money. A bigger, more lavish home. Everything she could want and more.

She'd fed him some children already, and promised him more. A part of her actually liked it, found it thrilling. The choosing of the child and then the luring. Like a spider tempting a fly into its web. He sometimes killed them in front of her.

She enjoyed watching.

Glancing over at the mother of Betty Ripsom, who had been religiously standing outside the school everyday, she felt a small twinge of remorse. Only a little, burrowed deep within the exhilaration. Betty had been her first victim, luring the child to the Barrens and she was subsequently snatched up by Pennywise, dragging her tiny frame down into the depths of the sewers, her shoe falling off in the process.

She pushes any sense of lingering guilt aside as she turns and gets back into the bus as the children all finally take their seats inside. Whispering to each other, staring out the window at the greenery blurring by as the bus picks up speed. One student, however, sits up, realizing that they were taking a little longer to get to the first stop.

"Hey, Ms. Sawa? Where we going?" she queries, brows knotting together as she cranes her neck to glimpse the unfamiliar surroundings they'd entered.

No answer. Alison makes a turn alongside a dirt road that leads to a steep cliff overlooking a murky lake.

She then steps on the gas.

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"T-t-t-they h-h-haven't been a-a-ble to-to f-f-find the d-driver," Bill says as he, Eddie, Richie and Stanley linger outside the school the following morning. Police cars were parked along the roadside, with officers swarming around, questioning students, their parents and teachers.

"She's probably dead. None of the kids survived, she probably didn't." Stanley replies somberly.

"I'm telling you guys, there was something not right with that lady," Eddie says, his arm movements spastic as he spoke. "I'm telling you, she did it on purpose. I'm *telling you*. Nobody goes off a cliff like that on accident. The look in her eyes, I knew she was a crazy bitch!"

"W-w-we d-d-don't k-k-k-kno-" Bill begins before he's cut off by Officer Bowers.

"You four." he says, as he gestures them over to where he's standing near the curfew sign, slipping off his shades. They heed, charily approaching him, Bill leading the way as Stan dawdled behind, as he usually did.

"What can you tell about Ms. Sawa?"

"W-w-w-we d-don't r-r-real-ly -k-know h-her." Bill manages as Oscar looks more than a little perturbed at the rate in which Bill is responding. He glances to Richie.

"How about you? All of you?"

"No sir." Richie shakes his head. Stanley and Eddie mimic him, both uttering 'no' in unison.

"Well, run along then." Oscar slips his glasses back on and saunters off.

All four boys speedily make their way inside the school entrance.

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Beneath the town Alison had taken refuge within Pennywise's lair-at least she thought it was his lair. It certainly looked like it with the pile of trophies along with the corpses of the town's missing floating above it at the tip. Almost peaceful. Whatever he was, he clearly possessed great powers. Abilities that she had only caught a brief glimpse of. It excited her to think about what else he could do.

He'd not appeared when she first left the scene of the accident and fled to Neibolt under the cover of night, at first hiding in a dilapidated old shack in the Barrens, listening to the sounds of the sirens blazing.

It looked like a mere accident, under Pennywise's influence, she won't be discovered. Just an unlucky woman, but the high she'd felt driving towards the edge of the cliff was unmatched, only perhaps by the high that she'd felt knowing he'd been there.

She just did something unspeakable. For him.

Pennywise was around she was sure. Lurking, probably off hunting. As she sat on the wagon emblazoned with 'Pennywise The Dancing Clown,' her ears pricked at the sound of diminutive jingling bells and a small smile blooms across her features.

There he stood at the bottom of the junk pile, his off-white suit highlighted by the minimal light creeping in from above, gazing up at her with a neutral expression. She hops down and tracks across the various items, stepping over a soggy dirty mattress, as she comes to a halt before his massive frame.

"They're looking for me I'm sure, but they won't find me here," she smiles up at him, his mien still stoic, unresponsive. "They probably think I'm dead, but I can just stay here..."

*As she talked, It studied her. It knew what kind of human she was. It had in Its millennia of existence came across these types. Desperately searching for some meaning in their life. Lost, pathetically needy souls. Willing to kill their own mothers for some kind of acceptance.*

*She was, as It saw in her diseased mind, looking for something beyond being what she currently was—a tool. A game. A pawn.*

*The thought disgusted It beyond belief.*

*However, it had also made it fairly easy to manipulate her. It had not even influenced her to drive that bus off the cliff. She'd done it on her own. While it was soaking up the sorrow now washing over the town over the children's deaths, it was also disgusted; good meat had gone to waste.*

"So, I know you're alone down here." Alison reaches up to touch his white face, only to have him grip her wrist before her fingertips can touch his white cracked cheek.

Pennywise doesn't respond, he just moves in, quickly grabbing her about the throat, giving a raspy cackle, the sound echoing throughout the cisterns around them. She coughs, her air cutting off, reaching up to try to pry his bony fingers from her neck.

"I am alone and I prefer it that way. I've no use for attachments," His eyes glow brighter, a stunning shimmery yellow-gold. "Especially not to a parasite like yourself. I did nothing. I did not influence you. You did it of your own volition." he growls, his teeth now pointed and shark-like. She shrieks as he buries them into her shoulder, ripping away the flesh, the sensation like daggers, sharp burning and painful. It throws her to the ground, watering, stunned brown pupils glued on him.

She holds her shoulder, mouth gaping, silent. The pain she was feeling physically was nowhere close the emotional agony and humiliation that was searing through her. Almost as if it was setting her insides aflame. A single tear cuts down her milky cheek

*No, this was not how it was supposed to be.*

Pennywise kneels down by her. "Somebody has to take responsibility for the crash. When they find you, they will know. I will not aid you." he peers in her face, the scent of blood on his breath.

Her blood.

Alison screams as Pennywise grins, displaying his crimson-stained

incisors. "How can you do this to m-" she's cut off by him gripping her cheeks, squeezing.

"I did nothing, it was all you," he replies, standing and looking down at her, lip curling as his teeth shrink. "Pathetic."

*It influences a student from Derry High School to point in the direction of Alison. Saying he'd overheard her expressing contempt for the rowdy children she drove home. Her actions will not be viewed as a mere accident. The truth to be unveiled about that crash. Humans have no patience for ones like her. She will be seen as the true monster.*

The next day, the town is abuzz with news of the seemingly innocent new arrival who had intentionally crashed a school bus into a lake off a cliff. She was found, half-crazed, down in the Barrens, bleeding profusely from a wound no doubt given to her by some kind of animal, possibly a rabid coyote or dog. She rambled endlessly about a clown monster killing the town's children, but no evidence was found to support her claims.

Only days later, the horrific accident and the insane bus driver were soon pushed out of Derry's collective consciousness.

She currently sits in Juniper Hill Asylum.

### 3. Ron and Gary

#### Ron and Gary-1961

*I wandered so aimless, life filled with sin, I wouldn't let my dear savior in, then Jesus came like a stranger in the night, praise the Lord I saw the light.'*

"C'mon man, hurry up!" Gary yells over the warbling of Hank Williams, as Ron emerges, zipping his fly, from the nearby bushes just off to the side of the road, the red neon sign above the door of the only gay bar in Derry, the Falcon, painting his lean frame in vibrant crimson. He wipes his nose with the cuff of his plaid sleeve as he hops back in Gary's blue and white Ford pickup. He pauses, as he briefly makes eye contact with an extremely tall, pale man in a black leather jacket with a copper tuft of hair, shoulder blades rested against the wall near the bar's entrance. A thin trail of vapor snakes around his head as he watches.

Ron gives him a dirty look before slamming the truck door. "I don't know what the fuck he's starin' at." He casually rolls down the window to spit his lump of chewing tobacco to the blacktop.

Gary, a smaller man with a visible five o' clock shadow and a head sparsely covered in gray hair, scrunches up his face. "Man, you shouldn't do that. Kinda nasty..."

Ron gives a subtle scoff, arching his brows, he turns to his buddy, elbow rested on the dashboard.

"Oh, you offended there, Holdsworth?" he queries, as Gary observes his reflection in the rear view mirror, reaching up to massage his stubble. Ron gives another scoff, this time more derisive.

"Worryin' about your facial hair? Damn, maybe you should be in there with the fags." he says as he digs his finger in his right ear.

"Look, Nat just doesn't like stubble. She says it makes her itch."

"Take your balls outta her purse, alright? Real men sport beards-just

look at Paul Bunyan." he gives a cursory touch to his own dark thick hairy jawline peppered with gray streaks, his mind picturing the statue of the famed lumberjack on Main Street that the two had spent a fair amount of time loitering around well after midnight in their teens. Drinking, smoking and raising Hell.

"Now, let's get's outta here. I don't want anyone I know seeing me sittin' in front of this place." he adds.

On their way back from The Great Lost Bear, a bar two and a half miles down the road, the three pints Ron had consumed over the course of the evening to relax after a long strenuous day in the lumber yard had left his bladder about to burst and entering the Falcon to use their restroom was out of the question.

"Can't believe Elmer even lets that debauchery happen in there." Ron adds as Gary revs up the engine, his gaze landing on the strange man, unblinking and stone-faced, taking drawn-out drags from his cigarette nestled between his spindly fingers.

For a fleeting second, Gary seems to glimpse two tiny white spheres in the man's corneas.

"It's turnin' a profit...wonder who that is?" he inquires, craning his neck to peek around Ron's broad shoulders.

"Why? You interested?" Ron snickers.

"C'mon, cut it out. It's just he looks a...little weird." A few days before, the police had discovered a 1958 Chevrolet Impala that had belonged to two Beatniks that had been seen cruising around town, abandoned in a parking lot just a block away, dried blood cracked along the seats and smeared along the windows. Their bodies have yet to be found. Just as quickly as the news hit the papers, however, it was forgotten. He certainly didn't want to get caught out too late, not if there could be some psycho on the loose.

Something he wouldn't voice to Ron. No, such a concern would be met with taunts and accusations of being a "pansy."

"Just one of the queers." Ron dismisses, gesturing with an

underhanded finger motion for Gary to hurry up and get going, as he treats the man to another glower as Gary pulls out of the driveway.

The drive is quiet, the road isolated, dark, without another soul in sight. It's almost disquieting, until Ron cracks open another beer from the remaining six-pack stored in the backseat as he turns up the volume on the radio and starts to croon along;

*'Let me travel this land, from the mountains to the sea,'cause that's the life I believe, he meant for me, and when I'm gone, and at my grave you stand, just say God's called home, your ra-amblin' man-'*

*Wham!*

Both men are suddenly jerked forward as something violently slams against the tailgate of the truck, Ron's beer spilling into his crotch as he curses.

"The Hell?" he growls as he turns to look at the culprit. All he sees are bright orange headlights, seemingly not attached to any vehicle.

Gary takes rapid peeks over his shoulder, trying to catch a glimpse of the driver, as he rams into them again.

"What the Hell is this asshole doing?" Gary exclaims as he hits the gas. Ron keeps his gaze turned behind them, his lids now slitting as the other car's front window comes into view and he sees a silhouette of what looks like the man that had been standing outside the bar. His sleek black truck difficult to see in the pitch darkness.

"I think it's that weirdo from the Falcon," he says, crushing his half-spilled beer can, chucking it out the window, the remaining liquid splashing along the road. "He wants trouble, we can certainly give it to him." He flips the man the bird and his hand is immediately slapped down by Gary.

"Don't do that," he scolds. "He-"

*Wham!*

The man begins doing a continuous loop of bumping their tailgate and slowing down, only to speed up again and slam into them

harder.

Gary decides to do a sharp skid off the side of the road down a dirt path, both men bouncing in their seats as he takes off down the gravelly trail that cuts through a field, turning to head the other direction.

"Hopefully we can loose him." he says as he does a u-turn, wheels trampling the tall blades of grass. Now heading the opposite direction, cautious relief washing over him as he eyes Ron, who looks angry, his mouth a quivering thin line.

"I wish we could get our hands on that little fucker, we coulda-"

"No," Gary cuts him off, inhaling deeply. "Don't bring that up. I'm not doing that shit again. They don't hurt nobody. We just forget that."

"Yeah, whatever," Ron shakes his head, disgusted mien shadowed in the darkness of the vehicle. "You know you-"

Just then the mysterious driver appears in their path, seemingly out of thin air, coming directly at them at full speed.

"What the fuck!" Gary shouts as the orange headlights illuminate the inside of their truck. Gary shields his eyes as he struggles to swerve out of the way.

"The fuck! He's gonna crash into us the crazy bastard! Step it up!" Ron yells, anger now dissolving into panic as he grips the steering wheel. They skid off the side of the road, Gary slams his foot on the breaks, bringing them to a screeching halt along the miry ditch along the roadside.

There's a few moments of tension, with their ragged breaths visible in the chilly night air.

"Jesus, that crazy asshole was gonna kill us," Ron breathes. "Maybe he has a death wish."

"I don't get it. How'd he come out in front of us?" Gary ponders as is head darts around, surveying the area, sweat just starting to pearl at the top of his forehead. The road they were on, Witcham, circled

around a lake alongside the field. The man wouldn't have been able to come at them from the opposite direction without taking at least half an hour to drive around. The lake and trees made any shortcut impossible.

Just then, the radio begins to switch, jumping to different stations. Ron, eyes now bulging, silently elbows Gary as he stares at the dial visibly moving on its own. Gary's mouth gapes as both watch as it starts to shift back and forth, a barely-audible voice begins to emerge from the crackling static. Too distorted initially, before becoming louder, like the wails of a young man crying out in anguish.

"What the...what is that?" Ron breathes.

Louder and louder the voice cries, almost shrieking, until Gary reaches to shut off the dial, only to have it blare up again. Startling both men to fling open their respective doors to leap out.

"I don't know what's goin' on here." Ron shakes head as the the voice becomes more banshee-like, drifting outwards from the inside of the car and filling the murky air surrounding them, like an echo. Both men clamp their palms tightly to their ears as Gary manages to stumble inside and switch the dial off, the numbers glowing a dazzling orange-yellow.

"Let's go," he says, gesturing for Ron to get in. His friend heeds as Gary attempts to start up the engine.

"Shit..." he mutters.

"Lemme push." Ron offers as he jumps out to make his way to the tailgate. As he pushes, Gary slams on the gas and the truck rips out of the shallow ditch and Ron runs to take his seat.

"Go, go." he orders as he glances back to check for their attacker. No sign of those strange headlights in the distance.

His eyeline then lands on a shadowy figure standing near the ditch. Too dark to see, but clearly a young man, possibly a teenager.

That looks like...

It can't be him.

"Who is that?" he points back and Gary follows his gaze.

"I don't see anyone." he replies.

As both turn in unison to look ahead, they are met with a gory sight; on the hood of the truck is a young man, sitting cross-legged, eyesockets like pools of tar. His skin crumbling pieces of bloody strips.

And no mouth. Only pale skin with blue veins rooting along the surface.

He leaps upwards to the top of the truck, the shock causes Gary to swerve as both men scream in sheer horror.

*"Ahhh! Fuck! What the Hell is that?!"*

The ghoul disappears as Gary smacks into an ancient tree just near the edge of the lake, his skull cracking against the steering wheel as Ron hits the dashboard.

Gobsmacked, Ron sits frozen, blood coursing down his aching scalp and down his forehead, his lids fluttering as he tries to focus. He shakily reaches to touch Gary. He pushes his shoulder, but he only falls limp against the window. His brown pupils blank, lifeless.

Ron staggers out the truck, falling to ground, a stressed whimper escaping him as he comes to a halt along the swampy ground along the bank at a pair of muddy shoes. He charily gazes up, blood trailing from both nostrils as the mouthless spector stares down at him.

Seeing him up close made him more recognizable; Nathan Wells. He had been a sixteen year old student at Derry High School, rumored to have been gay. One drunken night Ron and Gary accosted him along the roadside while he was driving his father's truck, beat the boy with two-by-fours, tossed him into the truck and pushed it into the lake.

The same one he now sat beside.

"No," Ron wails. "No, no, it ain't you. It can't be." he hangs his head

down and begins to quietly sob.

Then, something begins stirring beneath the surface of the water, now bleeding with irradiated orange light, the frenzied bubbling dying down as a pair of headlights become visible, followed by the hood of a black truck.

In a burst of energy, Ron shoots up as he sees it's the same phantom vehicle that had been menacing them, those orange-yellow lights coming closer as it comes to a stop along the bank. The driver's side opens and the odd man with the auburn hair steps out, a creepy visage highlighted by the moonlight, dark crescents beneath his eyes as he flicks his cigarette to the swampy earth.

Ron is immobilized, almost hypnotized by the lights, his irises mimic that same blinding glow as the man approaches, bringing those long tapering fingers to Ron's face. His mouth now becoming elongated with needle-like stained incisors.

"Beautiful, beautiful fear..." he mutters as he chomps down on Ron's jugular, blood spurting in runnels from his neck as the flesh is torn away. Ron falls to the ground, gaze fixed on eternity.

*As It eats, It ponders. It had remembered these two and their act of violence that had awoken It twenty-seven years earlier.*

*Seeking them out, torturing and killing them was amusing.*

*After finishing devouring the flesh from Ron's corpse, It removes Gary's body from the truck and retreats back to Its lair.*

*It's a few days before the Ford truck is discovered under the giant tree, and after a brief investigation, the case is forgotten and the car taken to the junkyard where it sits alongside a 1958 Chevrolet Impala.*

## **4. Mike and Leroy Hanlon**

### **Mike And Leroy Hanlon-1989**

The yearly carnival in Bassey Park was always a success, with rides by Smokey's Greater Shows and games run by the local townsfolk. A success to others other than one Michael Hanlon.

While he enjoyed the event, he had been hoping to see the retired Canal Days Museum brought back, with various items from Derry's past hundred years, chronicling the town's history through photos, film reels and rusted worn-out artifacts. Perhaps that ancient tramp chair he'd heard about or photos of the Bradley Gang shoot-out. Although macabre, such things held a fascination for young Hanlon.

But no, instead there was nothing but game booths and a massive refreshment tent in Derry Park that resembled a circus tent with its thick red stripes but no museum. Not this year or the previous years. Interest seemed to have waned and the organizers decided that it was no longer a draw. A large stage with nightly band concerts was the replacement for what was deemed a bore.

The festivities were also a welcome escape from the recent tragic events involving a school bus driver and a growing number of missing.

Escapism was the usual remedy for Derry's troubles. Ignoring what is in plain sight seemed to be the go-to cure for many people not wanting to acknowledge certain things; another disappearance, usually a child, an uptick in violence, the somberness that hovered over the town like heavy storm clouds. Even when it was bright and sunny, there seemed to be a looming darkness constantly present.

Mike's grandfather was his company; the older Hanlon had to be encouraged for a night out with his grandson. Mike felt it was a nice escape from the daily stresses of the sheep farm. The older man's wariness towards the townsfolk, however, was putting a damper on Mike's enjoyment.

"The harder you work, the harder you play." Mike playfully elbows

Leroy as they stroll through the energetic activity of Bassey Park; a coruscating light show of neon colors flashing, adorning the murky night sky above along with the boisterous laughter of the attendees. Leroy is decked out in his heavy brown jacket with the large red patch on the left breast and his usual green and white cap. Mike sported a gray sweater with a white tee underneath.

"We don't belong here, with these people." Leroy mutters as he surveys the crowd, the sparks of color enveloping them reflecting in his rich brown irises.

"I wish they had the museum with the town history," Mike says, ignoring his grandfather's comment. "I was hoping it would be brought back this year."

"History we don't share with these folks." Leroy adds. "Feels like we're foreigners in this town. We don't speak the same language as them."

Mike sighs as he catches a glimpse of Henry Bowers, chatting up a petite blond girl from their school, just beyond the bumper cars, Mike directs Leroy behind a cotton candy booth, the sides splashed with poorly-painted depictions of a clown with flame orange hair and a garish smile.

"Here," Leroy fumbles around in his pocket, presenting a dollar bill. "Get some."

Mike dutifully takes the money and promptly buys a cone of pink fluffiness, the gloomy-looking man in the booth giving him a barely-there smile as he presented it.

"Thanks." Mike says as he and Leroy continue on, with Mike keeping a sharp look-out for any other Bower's Gang members lurking around. He lifts the cone to offer some to his grandfather.

"No thanks." Leroy's says flatly. "Never cared for that stuff."

Mike shrugs as he spies a magnificent carousel just ahead of them, its ornate golden and silver mirrored panels outlined in orange-yellow lights. Large mirrors aligned along its center, framed in gold. Definitely a stand-out among the other rides. There wasn't much of a

line, much to Mike's surprise, only a handful of other kids. Mesmerized, he tugs on Leroy's sleeve, maneuvering him towards the elaborate-looking display.

Standing beside it was an impossibly tall, lanky man dressed in ebony pants and a red jacket. A tuft of copper hair peeked out just beneath the rim of a top hat. Around his neck, a comically over-sized crimson bow tie. He looked like he'd stepped straight out of one of the old time photos of a ringmaster from the nineteenth century. Seems he was taking his role in the carnival to heart.

The carousel itself looked like it was from a time capsule, with painted landscapes on the rounding boards, large hand-carved wooden horses with wind-swept manes and sparkling bejeweled saddles emblazoned with golden leaves and vines. Tucked under the raised back of the saddles were smaller animals, such as parrots, squirrels and monkeys as well as tiny cherubs clutching horns.

The man with the top hat suddenly steps forward and gestures with a dramatic swooping motion for young Mike to come closer.

"It's the most fun at the carnival." he grins, his voice somewhat gravelly, motioning towards the carousel, gazing down at Mike with crystal azure eyes. The rim of the hat shaded his features, but his pupils almost looked like they were illuminated. Young Hanlon observes the man's face with his odd smirk and wide forehead.

"Yeah, I think it would be," Mike replies as he turns to his grandfather. "You going to...?"

"I'm fine here." Leroy replies, staring off, both hands in his jacket pockets.

Mike gives another shrug before stepping up to the carousel, still holding his cotton candy. He takes a seat on one of the horses along with several other children quietly following. He gazes out at the carnival goers, all laughing, drinking refreshments and conversing in lively conversation.

Still no sign of the rest of the Bower's Gang.

The tall auburn-haired man twirls his fingers as the ride begins, slowly. "I guarantee you," he declares, giving a wink. "This will be a ride you won't forget."

The carousel starts to gradually move as music starts to drift out into the night air, a song that seems an odd choice; Mozart's Requiem. As the carousel gains traction, a strange feeling of unease begins to bloom within Mike as he looks at the other children. All of them have their back to him, silent, their hands gripping the golden poles speared through the horse's saddles. The people standing around suddenly stop what they're doing, pausing in their activities with games and chatter to gawk, pointing and grinning.

Just as the crowd starts to gather, one of the other children glances over her shoulder at Mike, a maniacal grin on her face. Her expression sends chills throttling through him as her features begin to morph, her mouth expanding up to her eye sockets, displaying teeth blackened with rot, her pupils darkening, save for a tiny sparkle of yellow dots within the corneas.

The other children all turn in unison to face him, that same terrifying visage present as they start to cackle, their voices saturated with menace. Mike is now in full-blown panic as they start to look more ghoulish, more like zombies sitting upon the horses, whose carved eyes are now glowing fiery orange-yellow, pointed teeth protruding out from their curved lips as they begin neighing and violently kicking their hooves.

Before Mike can even think about leaping off, the vines adorning his horse's saddle slither around his waist, pinning him to his seat, his cotton candy cone tumbling to the ground. The undead children continue their laughing, their skin peeling off in bloody flaps, the spectators still chortling and pointing.

And his grandfather, where the Hell was he? Mike couldn't spot him in the crowd or anywhere, he'd vanished.

As the carousel starts to pick up speed, Mike glimpses his reflection in the mirrors, giving a startled yell as he sees his face starting to look old and haggard, with sunken dark half circles under the rims of his eyes and his hair now a longer, stringy, shocking white, as if he

was aging at an accelerated speed. Chest heaving with terror, he reaches up to touch his cheeks, his flesh seemingly normal, the terrifying reflection nothing but an illusion.

As he struggles to free himself from the vines, almost falling off the saddle, their tendrils tightening around his waist, the tiny animal and cherub carvings then suddenly spring to life, leaping from their seats, grabbing at his hair and clothing.

"Aw! Get off!" he shouts as he swats at the creatures, a parrot aggressively trying to peck at his face, the monkey grabbing his shirt and scrambling up his back.

Just then, he sees him; the odd man with that top hat, now seated upon one of the possessed horses, his mien now becoming paler before young Hanlon's eyes. Blood red streaks snaking up towards his forehead from his lips that are now a dark ruby. Shark teeth sprouting from his mouth as he cackles.

Now he looked more like a clown.

The carousel is now spinning at an unearthly speed, the scenery completely vanishing and being replaced with a haze of rainbow neon, like a ship traveling at hyperspeed, just like in the Star Wars films Mike was fond of.

The strange man rises and starts towards Mike, who is becoming light-headed as he attempts to keep his balance, feeling a rustle of nausea beginning to take root in the pit of his stomach.

"Faster and faster around we go, when we stop nobody knows." the man intones as he stands, gazing down at Mike, long tapering gloves fingers encircling the poles, the speed and wind rushing through seemingly not affecting him. He then leans in near Mike's face, his breath pungent and insipid.

"Et non morieris." he growls under his breath, thin saliva strings dangling from his lips, his once clear blue irises shine brilliant yellow, tinged with amber.

Mike tucks his head down, as a new feeling breaks through the sheer

terror; anger.

"Stop!"

With that, the chaos ceases. The cackling ugly voices, the rabid animals clawing at his skin, the sinister neighing of the horses. The children and the odd man are gone, replaced with the bustling voices of the carnival attendees as Mike dares to peer out from under his arms. Only the crowd, still engaged in their merriment, with but a few sending him a look of curiosity as he inspects his surroundings.

"You okay kid?" one random bearded man in a plaid shirt queries. Mike gives a polite nod as he continues to inspect the area.

No man with a top hat. No carousel. No dead children.

Nothing.

Just the uncut greenery on which he stood, no sign of a carousel, or any evidence one had been there. Only a large bare space. He charily begins to move, gazing around, trying to locate his grandfather. It's only a few moments before he spies him, stumbling out of the Hall of Mirrors, of all places.

"Grandpa!" Mike yells as he runs to him, just about knocking Leroy down as he hugs him.

"Mike..." his grandfather curves his arm around him. "I thought I lost you. Was thinking maybe you went into there," he nods toward the entrance, his brows knotting in confusion. "We seem to have gotten separated."

"I was on that carousel...didn't you se it?"

*Please tell me you did.*

"I didn't see no carousel. I think...I think we need to leave."

"Yeah," Mike nods rapidly, still getting over the intense fear and confusion trembling through him. "Yeah, let's get home." Mike places his arm about Leroy's back as they walk away, with Mike directing them away from Henry Bowers once more.

"Something wrong?" Mike glances up at Leroy. The older man's countenance quiet and troubled.

"I..." he hesitates. "Saw something in there..." he looks over his shoulder at the Hall of Mirrors, growing smaller as they walk farther away.

"What?" Mike halts to stare up at Leroy, who gives a morose shake of his head.

"Never mind," he replies, not wanting to mention the horrible sight he'd seen in the distorted mirrors; flames and people screaming, running for their lives, their cries still reverberating through his mind. "Let's just get outta here. I told you, we don't belong."

Mike gives a tacit nod, not wanting to argue. Arguing with his grandfather was like running a marathon with no end in sight, there was no winning. Whatever secrets he harbored, he wouldn't be sharing.

Just like the cursed town. Its secrets locked up within the city limits.

As they exit Bassey Park, Mike glimpses a large red balloon, completely isolated near a large oak, boldly printed with 'I Love Derry.'

## 5. The Bradley Gang

### The Bradley Gang-1935

The lightning pulses across the gray October sky as Arthur, decked out in his spectacles he seldom wore, leans under the hood of the broken down LaSalle. George and Al stand beside him, restless eyes switching between the car's innards and the moonless cloudy night sky, with the storm just beginning to gather momentum. George has a small flashlight raised just above Arthur's head, highlighting the smoking engine.

George's wife Kitty remains inside the vehicle, fingering her compact mirror, trying in vain to powder her nose in the less than adequate lighting.

Parked just behind the LaSalle was a Chevrolet, with Joe's arm hanging out the driver window, cigar smoke clouding from his thin lips, elbow rested along the door. His brother Cal sat in the passenger seat, leaning on his hand, looking thoroughly bored with the situation. In the backseat are Marie and Patrick, with Marie leaning against his thick brown coat.

"Think we can get it going again?" George queries as he nervously casts his gaze around them, his timorous visage briefly made visible in the crack of light that splits across the sky. Marie nuzzles closer to Patrick, tucking her head down as thunder rolls above them. Patrick pulls her closer, stroking her brown curls.

"The engine's blown..." Al offers, ducking down to inspect closer.

"Aye. Seen better days, I'm sure," Arthur slams the hood down and wipes his hands with a stained white handkerchief from his pants pocket. "This ain't goin' nowhere, lads."

"Shit," George straightens as he switches off the flashlight. "What we gonna do?"

"Dunno." comes Al's simple reply.

They were safe, far away from the Lafayette city limits. After dumping the body of the banker they'd kidnapped in a swamp after collecting the thirty thousand in ransom money, they were on Route 2 in direction to a town called Derry after a brief stop in Augusta. Arthur, however, had his sights set on Bangor. When the LaSalle broke down just short of them reaching the Derry welcome sign along the shadows of the trees on the outskirts of the town.

A hush falls over the group as Al saunters out onto the middle of the road, sniffing and kicking a pebble aside. That's when he sees, in the far off distance, a pair of headlights appearing almost out of nowhere. He rushes to the driver's side of the LaSalle and reaches for his Colt .38 revolver-small and discreet, so as to be presented at the first sign of trouble.

He stands and waits as George tosses the flashlight in through the back window of the LaSalle and stands alongside Al, arms folded, not nearly as alert as his big brother.

Inside the Chevrolet, Patrick rests his hand on his Luger laying on the seat beside Marie that he'd stolen off the body of a Lafayette officer.

Meanwhile, Joe and Cal also ready their weapons, with Joe craning his neck out the window to view the car drawing closer.

Arthur casually strolls to the passenger side, eyeing his own much larger Remington 22. Al preferred a sneak up and get them approach. Arthur preferred things more direct. If whoever this was coming up the road was going to give them trouble, they would be dealt with accordingly before they even knew what hit them.

The car, a Ford Roadster, quietly comes closer, eerily serene, the headlights taking on a more orange tint as it draws near. It comes to a stop alongside the Chevrolet, the silhouette of a driver, a man with hat, is barely visible.

As he shuts the engine off, he sits a moment, George tightens his grip on his revolver as Arthur keeps watch on his Remington. Then the man leans over to the passenger side, rolling down the window.

"You needing some help there?" a gravelly voice drifts out of the

Ford, a hint of a lisp making the 's' sound more like 'shum.' Al snatches up the flashlight and strolls over, shining it in the man's face and is a little taken aback by what he sees.

Scars. Thin pale scars, ever so faint, threading up the man's creamy cheeks, beginning at the corners of his mouth and ending just under the rim of his Homburg hat.

"You needing some help?" the scarred man repeats. "I've fixed a car or two here and there. I could take a look-see."

"Yeah, yeah...sure." Al replies, studying the man's features, with his square jaw and intense round eyes.

*This guy looks like he knows where some bodies are buried.*

Al tenses as the driver side door pops open and the man emerges, revealing an incredibly tall frame in a sleek gray suit. Certainly taller than all of the men in their group.

In fact, he was a good foot taller than Al.

No matter. If this fellow pulled any funny business, they outnumbered him.

"Here," the man saunters over to the LaSalle, popping open the hood. He reaches his long arms in and begins tampering with the wires. Not long after there's a loud 'pop' sound and the engine roars back to life, taking a few minutes to struggle before running smoothly. Arthur gives a pleased nod of his head.

"Thanks mate!" He gives the man an enthusiastic pat on the back as Al looks relieved, exchanging glances with George.

"What's your name , my good sir?" George inquires.

"Robert. Robert Gray. Although folks 'round here call me Bob."

The man shuts the hood and returns to his car, before he removes his hat to give his scalp a quick scratch, revealing a shock of auburn.

"You folks needing a place to stay for the night? Something tells me

you'd rather not be in a motel. Gotta place just a mile up the road. Nice and cozy," he gazes at Kitty and Marie. "The ladies can clean up. Sit by the fire, get warm. Maybe a hot meal."

Arthur looks at both George and Al, who in turn glance to Joe and Cal, with Patrick keeping his eyes on the strange man, sizing him up.

*Something not right with that fella.*

"I'm pretty knackered," Arthur whispers as he tilts closer to Al and George. "And if this chap thinks he's gonna pull something, we'll handle it. At any rate, we'd have a place to lay low. If he oversteps, we'll teach him a lesson."

"Looks like somebody already did." Al retorts before turning on his heel to face the man. "Alright. One night. We'll be outta your hair come morning."

"Great!" the man replies, grinning as he retreats back inside the Roadster. Patrick is watching the man from behind the foggy glass of the backseat window, brows knotting together as the man begins to drive ahead. Arthur, Al and George retreat back into the LaSalle and follow, with the Chevrolet right behind.

Patrick taps Joe on the shoulder. He grunts in response. "What's it now, Caudy?"

"That guy, he don't look right to me. Got a feelin' in my gut," Patrick says, keeping his dark eyes fixed ahead on the Roadster. "He's bad news, I can feel it."

"And if you're right, we'll put a bullet in his melon. No big deal. Guy seems kinda dopey to me anyhow," Joe says breezily as he chucks his cigar out the window. "Not really a threat. Doubt he's ever fired a gun in his life."

Patrick is not convinced. "You saw his face. He looks like a blind man tried to take a whack at him," he glances at Marie. "And I don't like how he was lookin' at her."

Joe chortles softly to himself. *Doubt she'd mind it.*

At this, point, both he and Cal had secret trysts with her behind Patrick's back. He suspected she'd also been fooling around with Arthur too. An assumption born out of her comment about his "sexy" Irish accent.

Funny, Patrick was suspicious of total strangers, but not the men he'd grown to call friends.

Maybe it's because he'd never had any before. His paranoia was off-putting but also what made him so kill crazy. Handsome to look at, but underneath was a volcano. Always ready to erupt at the slightest provocation.

Not tonight. Joe would see to that.

"Don't go pulling any of that shit. We don't wanna be drawing attention to ourselves here. Not in this hick place. You know these small towns. Everyone knows everyone. Just keep quiet. We don't need a repeat of Toledo."

Patrick had gone ballistic on a gas attendant he'd *thought* muttered some smart-ass comment under his breath. They'd sped out of there after Patrick splattered the man's brains along the smooth concrete with a single clean bullet to the temple.

Patrick sits back, roughly pulling Marie to him as Joe glances at the street sign; 29 Neibolt.

The Roadster parks in front of a large Victorian house. With the LaSalle and Chevrolet lining up right behind.

"Whoa," Cal mumbles as he peers around his brother to glimpse the place. "Seems this fella might have some serious dough."

"Looks like a dump to me." Joe replies, shutting off the engine and swinging open the door. He was not a man who was easily impressed and he'd robbed much more grander mansions than this in Danville.

"Kinda gammy looking." Arthur mutters to himself as he slides out the LaSalle.

Patrick steps out, followed by Marie, who looks dazzled, her hazel

eyes wide and her ruby red lips breaking out in a smile. It was the style of house that had always struck her fancy.

"This place is gorgeous. Just look at that architecture! It's a palace!" she exclaims as she rushes ahead, making her way to the front porch, past sunflowers sprouting from the grassy front yard. Robert reaches down and plucks one, handing it to Marie.

"Sunflowers symbolize healing and good luck." he elucidates as she tucks it behind her ear. Patrick stands glaring as Joe touches his shoulder.

"Don't. It's harmless." he growls.

"Thank you. That's really very sweet, sir." Marie touches the flower.

"Sweets to the sweet, I say." Robert replies.

Patrick shakes Joe's hand off before he stalks towards the porch as everyone begins to pile into the home. As elegant inside as out, with a lovely red Victorian chaise lounge, matching camelback sofa and parlor chairs, each one sitting across from each other in front of the fireplace. The mantel boldly read 'Good Cheer, Good Friends.'

George smiles and playfully swats Robert's arm. "We're good friends now, eh, Bob?"

*And friends help each other.*

*Too bad we don't have the means to clean this place out. The furniture would make a buck or two.*

Robert merely smirks. A slow, deliberate smile as he looks at George. "Sure thing there. Why don't you all have a seat. I'll be right back."

"That's what my ex-wife said." Arthur quips as he collapses on a parlor chair, sprawling his legs out. It takes him a moment to notice; there's a fire now crackling inside. He stares at it, puzzlement blinking across his mien.

*Huh, when did he do that? It wasn't going when we arrived and he didn't go near it...*

*No matter. Just enjoy it.*

Kitty approaches the mantel, running her long shiny nails along little figurines of clowns, each made of delicate painted porcelain, juggling, balancing and one holding a bundle of red balloons.

"These are beautiful figurines." she says, tucking a tendril of sandy blonde behind her ear, bringing her blue irises closer to examine the fine details.

"Take one. Just throw it in your purse. Might as well." George blurts out. Kitty whirls around.

"We're his guests. He was kind enough to let us in here."

"Come now, lass. Let's not pretend this bloke is an average citizen. You saw his face." Arthur offers, stretching his arms and folding his hands behind his skull, giving her an amused expression. "Looks to me like he may have been in a wee bit of trouble. He was probably acting the maggot and someone decided enough was enough. Could be a right eejit."

"Yeah," Al cradles his chin in his left fingers, massaging the dark stubble. "There's something...I gotta feeling he wouldn't rat us off. There's no way he wouldn't of recognized me, at least."

*He's hiding something himself. Al could always sense them. His fellow 'bad seeds.' The people who ran in the gutters. The lowlifes. He could always pick them out.*

The wanted posters were scattered across the midwest, plastered along buildings, hanging in post offices and police stations baring Al's face; wanted for bank robbery kidnapping and murder, with a reward of five-thousand dollars offered. He'd taken up with his old childhood friends the Conklin brothers Joe and Cal, who were small time, with but a few petty theft arrests between them. Patrick had killed a cop in Lafayette during their last raid and prior to that had just a few arrests for assault. He was a friend of Joe and Cal from their early gang days and they'd reconnected with him when Joe briefly did time for robbery, knocking off a small liquor store in Bloomington. He and Patrick had shared a cell.

As for Arthur Malloy, also known as 'Creeping Jesus' because he was nearsighted, he'd fled Ireland after killing a man he claimed insulted his dead sister who'd just passed away from tuberculosis. ("Kicked 'em square in the plums, then put a bullet in his brains, I did.") They'd met when Arthur was attempting to knock off the same liquor store as them and offered his LaSalle that he'd stolen as a getaway.

Patrick's girlfriend Marie Hauser had inadvertently joined the gang, initially trying to persuade him to leave, but soon became an active member. But her role was mostly cooking and washing linens, hence her much-despised nickname, "The washerwoman."

George's wife Kitty Donahue was another matter. She entered the gang enthusiastically and without hesitation, but Al has never so much as seen a gun in her hands. Not one for shooting, she'd say.

Patrick sits on the camelback, with Marie beside him, still happily fingering the sunflower. He glances up as Robert emerges, hat and coat discarded and hair combed back. He points towards the kitchen.

"This way," he says, gliding down the stairs. "Let's eat. Got some stew heating on the stove. Some wine on the table."

Arthur pauses as they all stand, the edges of his brows coming together in rumination.

*When did he get that going?*

Shaking the thoughts from his mind, he continues on with the others, with Kitty quickly swiping one of the figurines from the mantel and tucking it into her purse. The one with the balloons.

They all settle around the large rectangular mahogany-carved table with Robert dumping a hefty spoonful of a rather unappetizing red slop into each bowl. Patrick suddenly rises.

"Where's your bathroom?" he queries curtly.

Robert points. "Third door on the right."

Patrick darkly glances at Marie, then Robert before exiting. The murmuring of the group's voices fade as he stomps up the stairs,

making his displeasure with the situation known. Of course, his real intention was to inspect this place. Make sure no one was hiding anywhere. He makes his way along the house's arteries, looking in various rooms, until he hears a door loudly creak. This makes him halt, glancing over his shoulder

The door to a room across from him is ajar, the lights inside faint, but enough to showcase what's inside.

Clown dolls.

Patrick charily begins to edge towards it, his boots stepping lightly as he sneaks up. He knew that man was strange. Something off about him. This could be an ambush. Nobody is this gracious. Not in his life experience. Everyone is always wanting something from you.

"Ah-ha!" he shouts, throwing open the door all the way and leaping in. He stands a moment, surveying the area with the clown dolls of all shapes and sizes along the wooden floor. Framed along the walls; more clowns of the sad crying variety.

"Jesus..." Patrick strolls over to the windows-also baring clowns-the circus-themed stained glass were partly obscured by thin brown cloths layered thick with dust.

*Heh,heh.*

Patrick spins around.

*Who was that?*

He reaches inside his coat and grips his Luger. "Hey, who's there?"

It had sounded like a man's voice inside the room with him, but before he could comprehend where a possible attacker could be hiding in here, he sees that the heads of the creepy dolls are now all turned towards him. Watching.

*Whoosh.*

The cloths covering the windows plunge to the floor and Patrick flinches as he turns to face the sound.

*Hee!*

Patrick does another turn around to face the clowns. That one sounded like a child. Specifically a girl coming from somewhere within the clutter of the room.

In that moment, Patrick feels something he hadn't felt in ages, since he was a boy running from his father's belt; fear. A powerful, overwhelming sense that he needed to leave this room now. The instinct to protect himself had kicked in.

He dashes towards the door, coming to a skidding stop before it slams shut. His breathing heavy, his heart hammering against the cavity of his chest.

Back in the kitchen, Patrick storms in, returning to his seat, sweat beaded along his large forehead. Marie touches his trembling hand.

"You alright?"

"Yeah, fine," he breathes, wild pupils directly on Robert. "Got a thing for clowns there, *Bob?*"

Robert slowly chews, staring back, before loudly swallowing. "Yes, sir. You could say that...I see you found my collection. "

"And it's a lovely one. I saw your figurines." Kitty interjects.

"Pretty fuckin' weird to me. A grown man..." Patrick grumbles. "What you hidin' in here?"

Robert snuffles, nibbling on his food. "Nothing, I assure you, Mr. Caudy-"

"Oh bullshit! What are you hidin'! What's in that room you freak!?" Patrick shouts as he stands, with Marie trying to subdue him and Joe mouthing curse words, when Kitty shrieking at the top of her lungs shatters the tension.

All eyes are drawn to her as she stares gaping at her spoon. "It's a finger!" she screams, holding it out for George to take a look. Upon inspecting it, he chuckles.

"It's a carrot honey." he pushes the vegetable slathered in red sauce around on the spoon.

"I swear, for a moment it looked just like a finger! A child's finger." Kitty pants, her palm clasped to her chest.

Patrick sinks back down to his chair, not taking his eyes off Robert, who chuckles.

"No fingers. Just an old family recipe, you could say."

"And what of your family Mr. Gray? Do you have a wife? Kids?" Marie chirps, trying to calmly rub Patrick's forearm. Robert considers a moment.

"No wife. No kids."

"Had to think about it huh?" Patrick cuts in. Joe gives him a swift kick to the shin under the table. Patrick glowers.

Unfazed, Robert continues, "I live alone. Just myself. Seems I've been alone for an eternity." he chortles that last line, as he sips his wine.

"I'd die from the loneliness." Marie replies.

"Nah, no one really dies in Derry." Robert says, to which an awkward silence falls over the table.

After a few beats of quiet. "So, uh, swinging bachelor huh?" George grins. "I kind of envy you..."

At this, Kitty scowls, gently, playfully swatting his arm. Al then stands, pushing his chair out. "Well, we best be getting to bed. We got an early start tomorrow." he announces.

Robert shows them to their rooms, pulling blankets from the closets for makeshift beds on the floors of the bedrooms to accommodate all of them, with Arthur opting to sleep downstairs on the camelback. Patrick keeps Marie locked in his sights as Robert bids them goodnight, shutting off the lights.

The house falls dark, with no sound, not even the thunder could be

heard. Just deathly cold silence. As each member of the Bradley gang dozes off.

Patrick, having fallen asleep with troubled thoughts, realizing the man knew his surname when he'd not offered it, is soon awakened by a pair of hands on him. Small hands, shaking him violently.

"The Hell?" he mutters, wiping the sleepiness from his eyes as he looks up. Nothing there. He sits up, glancing at a slumbering Marie as he is pulled, almost hypnotically, to that odd clown room again. Almost as if waiting for him, the door swings open. Hearing the beckoning of a little girl's voice, not very audible before, but crystal clear now.

"Molly..." he whispers as he sees a miniature coffin now on display between the stained glass windows, the clown dolls forming a pathway as he approaches.. The door quietly shuts behind him as the coffin lid creaks open. He glances down at his hands, seeing he is now smaller, childlike, around twelve. The age he was when Molly drowned.

In her coffin, her eyes are closed, her face sweet. Her skin a pale blue and her brown ringlets held by pink ribbons. Sniffing, Patrick leans in to kiss her cheek. "I'm so sorry I couldn't save you." he whimpers through stinging tears. As he hangs his head, Molly's eyes burst open and she draws in a sharp breath.

"Ah!" Patrick stumbles backwards as Molly bolts upwards scowling, mouth sneering in contempt.

"Sorry for *what*? Hitting me in the head with that rock and accidentally knocking me into the river or running off like a coward? You didn't even try to save me, you fucking wimp."

She steps out of the coffin and leaps to the ground as Patrick watches her features distort, growing more white, her lips redder. She spreads her arms out, grinning maniacally, her angelic voice now raspy and insidious.

"Beautiful fear." she grins as she runs at him, roaring as she displays quill-like teeth, growing taller, her brown locks turning orange, her

frilly pink dress becoming a gray-white. The clown dolls hiss with laughter as Patrick is backed against the door, which suddenly opens and Marie is there, screaming as the Molly creature, now a lanky tall clown with a striped face, comes at them. Patrick, now an adult man again, staggers up, terror gripping every inch of his being as he slams the door, yanking Molly away.

In the next room, George, Al and Kitty are awakened by the screams, as Kitty flips on the bedside lamp, standing just before them is the banker, covered in blackened mud and slime, his jaw dangling as he reaches his dislocated right limb out towards them. A deep otherworldly moan emitting from his misshapen mouth.

"Oh my God! Oh my God!" Kitty screams hysterically as George and Al reach for their guns, finding they are unable to fire.

"What the Hell! My gun is jammed up!" Al yells as they scramble for the door. Thankfully the banker zombie was nowhere near their escape route and they dash out, meeting Marie and Patrick, both holding each other. The lights above them flicker off and on, with a hideous high-pitched giggle echoing through the walls as Joe and Cal burst from their room, both looking pale.

As if they'd seen a ghost.

"That gas station worker Patrick iced? He's in our fucking room! Looking like he crawled straight outta his grave!" Cal yells.

Just then, they hear Arthur shouting. They all make their way downstairs, where Arthur is in the kitchen, his scrawny frame cowering against the wall, yelling as he points at a large boiling pot on the stove.

"I woke up and heard someone in the kitchen then I-I saw..." he stutters as he points a shaky finger at the pot. George steps over and gags at what he sees.

A head. Too disintegrated to tell the gender or age, boiling in blood. The sight and smell of rotting flesh sends George gagging and choking as he falls backwards, covering his mouth.

"Jesus fuck!"

"What is it?" Kitty demands.

"Never mind." George coughs.

Huddled together, they run towards the front door, The lights still flashing, the ugly laugh still reverberating. They all jump into their cars and by the grace of God, the LaSalle starts, engine blaring as they speed away. Some only barely clothed, with Marie wrapped in Patrick's coat that she often slept in to keep warm.

As dawn bleeds through the sky and the gang take refuge in a nearby farmhouse, the extra clothes and guns in the trunks of the cars coming in handy, The women take a calming trip to Freese's with Patrick in tow while the rest of the men went to Machen's Sporting Goods to order some more supplies. Lal, the owner, recognized Al immediately, despite the fake name he'd given; Richard D. Rader, and informed some of his buddies that he was expecting Al Bradley at two in the afternoon the day after tomorrow and just as the LaSalle and Chevrolet came into view on Main Street, the gang of Derry residents, armed to the teeth, opened fire.

As the shoot-out ensues, Biff Marlow, one of the gunmen, spies a scar-faced man in a gray suit with a sunflower tucked in the left breast pocket firing a Remington along with them. In fact, all the gunmen had spotted this complete stranger. They all figured he was an outsider wanting to join the party. Afterwards, as the bodies of the notorious Bradley Gang were on display in the bullet-ridden Chevrolet and LaSalle, Marlow watches as the man strolls away, whistling, one hand cradling the Remington on his shoulder, the other in his pocket.

Marlow could never be certain, and it bothered him for years after. Something he related to his drinking buddies while reminiscing about the killings. He could have sworn that, despite the bright sunlight, the stranger didn't cast any shadow.

No shadow at all.

## 6. Robert, Agnes and Emma Gray

### Robert, Agnes and Emma Gray-1881

At the start of Autumn, in the chilly, foggy early hours of the morning, the circus arrived to sleepy Derry. The colorful painted wooden wagons and elephants parading along Witcham Street drew the children of the town out of their homes to smile, gawk and laugh while still in their pajamas.

The performers clamored about the town, exploring, or posing for photographers as set-up began, including the biggest draw of all; the big top tent being erected by young laborers. Decked out in overalls with smudged cheeks, they traveled with the circus and during performances often did humdrum chores, such as tending to the animals and the handling of props the various performers used during their acts. The laborers, while not paid well, certainly ate well, with three hearty meals a day. The opportunity for travel was also desirable for many young men and women.

The wagons were sitting in a circle around Bailey Park, in the center is one emblazoned with 'Pennywise The Dancing Clown.'

Otherwise known as Robert Gray, formerly Gustafsson. He'd picked up his stage name while performing in London with an English clown George Rowley, known as 'Sad Jacques,' who uttered the saying, "Penny wise and pound foolish" in response to the lavish spending he'd witnessed while in the city. Robert found the saying delightful and adopted it as a stage name. Before, he simply was known as 'The Dancing Clown.'

Robert was born in Södermalm, the only son of Anna and Sven, both from families of dancers, musicians and actors. His father had been known simply as "The Sångare," and had moved the family to England upon landing work at King's Theater. His actress mother made regular appearances on the Royal Theatre stage.

The family's home life was often filled with drama that matched that depicted in his mother's plays; his father had at least three different mistresses, each having bore him a child. Robert had never

acknowledged or spoke with any of them. His father was also a strict disciplinarian, often beating Robert mercilessly for something as trivial as not finishing all of his vegetables.

His father, who had a taste for the macabre, also spent a fair amount of time consuming magazines and books filled with horrifying tales of people being buried alive. As a result, this caused him to request that his teenage son promise to behead him upon death for fear of premature burial. When the time came, Robert did as asked and upon the death of his mother a few years later, set out on his own, mostly finding work in Italy, Denmark and Sweden.

It was in London where Robert met his charismatic wife Agnes, also known by her stage name Elvira, who was a trapeze artist famed throughout Europe as the "Daughter Of The Air." Her performances often took her up fifty to sixty feet from the ground, without using any net or other safety measures. The audiences adored her and she was often the subject of magazine news articles.

Born in Stockholm, she was of Danish ancestry and had come from a family of trapeze artists, 'The Flying Jensens' and had been performing since she was a toddler, with her father balancing her on his hand during his opening act.

Robert had been taken with her hourglass figure, and long light brown hair which was well past her waist. She'd been drawn to his height and striking eyes, the blue-green color reminding her of the sea. Even finding his slight buck teeth appealing. They had eloped when they were touring with the French circus director Didier Gautier in Cirque Du Nord

Their seven year old daughter Emma was a dark-haired morose child who was born in Austria while the couple were touring with Circus Renz.

When America came calling, they landed on Ellis Island and they promptly changed the family name from Gustafsson to the more easily pronounced Gray and eventually were hired by P.T Barnum upon hearing of the couple's fame throughout Europe.

America, however, wasn't all it was advertised to be, and Agnes and

Robert were becoming increasingly weary with life on the road. Overworked and exhausted, at this point their young daughter was their priority and settling down was maybe what was best for her. A stable home. School. And, most of all, friends. The girl was isolated, and apart from a stuffed lion she called 'Fred' given to her by the lion tamer Isaac Van Der Berg, she had no real companions. She often spent long hours sitting in Agnes' wagon printed with 'The Legendary Elvira,' reading or playing marbles while the couple did their shows.

Derry seemed like the perfect place to settle down permanently. They had acquired enough savings to live comfortably.

Upon their exploration of the town, Robert, Agnes and Emma happened upon 29 Neibolt Street and a lovely two-story mansion, somewhat rundown-looking, encircled by patches of half-dead grass and sunflowers that looked like tiny suns sprouting around the yard. Upon talking with the locals they discover that the home is for sale and was owned by one of the wealthiest families in Derry, the Muellers.

In fact, according to the local residents, the place hadn't been lived in for many years. The last known occupants, the Vance family, had moved out around thirty years prior. There were whispers that the place was haunted-rumors both Robert and Agnes immediately dismissed.

But not so much Emma. Standing outside the wrought iron gates, she gawks up at the circular attic window at the very top, goosebumps breaking out along her skin. The window almost resembles the eye of a cyclops, watching her closely. She takes a step backwards.

"No, I don't want to go in here." she mumbles, dropping her head down, holding Fred tight to her plaid dress, prying her fingers from her mother's. The house had a strange atmosphere, like it would come alive and gobble her up if she set one foot inside.

Like some kind of monster from a fairytale.

"It's just a house, my love. Nothing to harm you," Agnes lovingly reassures. "Nothing to be afraid of."

Robert gives his daughter a gentle rub along her shoulders, removing his cigar from his lips to give her a comforting smile. "We're just going to have a look around, okay? Nothing to fear."

*She's never lived in a house before. It's all a little foreign to her. She'll adjust.*

But there's *something* about this house. Something drawing Robert to it. It certainly wasn't the most attractive and the work going into it would be time-consuming. But there was a charm about it. It had potential to be their dream home.

Robert leads his family in, with Emma returning her hand to her mother's protective grip. Once inside, they stand gazing about the living room, admiring the woodwork; the staircase and wooden beams, evidence of fine craftsmanship. The furniture was still here, as if the former owners had left in a hurry. The fireplace inlaid with 'Good Cheer, Good Friends,' and a piano sits beneath the window, sunrays coating along its white and black keys, the dust particles floating through the air twinkle in the warm light.

"The price they're asking for this place is a bargain, given how it includes the furniture and everything," Robert says as he approaches the stairwell. "Seems too good to be true."

"The furniture will have to be replaced. Look at it," Agnes runs a white gloved hand along the blanket of dust along the wooden frame of a parlor chair. "It's filthy! We can't possibly use it."

"No, just a little dirty. Just needs some sprucing up a bit. Just a little bit of love." Robert grins like a kid, his round cheeks turning up as he bounds up the stairwell.

Agnes follows, with Emma at her heels, clinging to her, her large brown irises searching along the walls, waiting to see if something emerges, or moves out of anywhere. A pair of massive hands with hairy fingers reaching out for her, like a troll from the Scandinavian folk tales the children back home told around a camp fire. The eerie sensation that this house was somehow alive was rustling within her. Every nook and cranny was just seeping with this discomfort.

Robert opens a door to a bedroom where two of the windows have been shattered.

*No matter. Easily replaced.*

Agnes enters behind him, leaving Emma out in the hall. As she stands, a whispered voice touches her eardrums.

*Emma.*

Startled, the girl spins around. That voice was neither male nor female. That was not either of her parents calling her name. Although it seems like it was speaking to her through her mind. A cursory glance into the bedroom shows her parents are preoccupied with discussions of renovations.

*Emma.*

She stares down the hall towards the kitchen as the door opens ajar and just inside there's a miniature ball of light, doing a little dance mid-air. It looked no bigger than one of her marbles. It reminded her of the fairy stories her mother told her. Describing the little sprites as having an otherworldly glow.

*It couldn't be though, could it?*

Without hesitation she runs to the kitchen as it disappears behind the doorway. She stands watching, holding Fred tighter to her as the little glowing ball skips through the air to the open door of the basement, casting its luster along the darkness. As she steps closer, she feels a pull, a force, beckoning her further in. Like a pair of large invisible hands guiding her along by her shoulders.

She had to go down there.

As she enters, standing atop the steps leading down into the murkiness, she is met with a bone-chilling cold, the clammy decayed odor of the basement air meets her nostrils, causing her to cough. She charily begins to descend the stairwell, in direction of the light ball as it highlights each step, creaking loudly under her tiny feet as she reaches the bottom.

There, just a few feet from her, in a weak beam of sunlight from a nearby window, is an ancient stone well. The little ball of light hovering just above it, circling the opening. The well is partly destroyed, a rusted pulley dangles just above. With Fred still tight in her arms, she stares at it, almost mesmerized. Gradually, she starts to come closer. As she does, something moves just along the broken stones.

A pair of luminescent yellow-orange hands rise from within and cup the tiny light ball, followed by the head of a woman with her hair pinned back, her entire face illumined in that same bright color that resembled an amber gemstone. She rises up out of the well, still holding the tiny bead of light, wings sprouting out from her back. She lands on her feet with a dainty ballet-dancer like movement, wearing the same style of lace-up slippers and dress her mother wore when she performed.

Emma stares, her mouth agape.

*A real fairy. An actual real-life fairy.*

The fairy gestures for her to draw near. "Come." she says in a delicate feminine voice that sounds like an angel, or the most delicate porcelain bell chiming.

Emma heeds, inching closer, in utter awe of what she was seeing. The fairy sticks her hand out, wiggling her slender fingers. "Come with me, child."

Emma swallows, still feeling the embers of fear smoldering, although much of it had dampened. But a fluttery anxious feeling was still present. "Come where?" she inquires.

"Come and you'll float. I promise. Don't you want to have wings?" the fairy replies, turning her shoulders slightly to display hers. "Come and you will float too."

Emma is about to take her hand, when she sees the fairy's features up close. Her eyes are two empty black sockets. At this, Emma pulls back, an unnerving feeling starting to shiver through her.

"Um, that's okay. I-I think I need to go upstairs now," she says as she starts to back away, gaze not wavering from the strange sight. "I need to leave now."

The beaming visage the fairy was displaying now falters, her tiny mouth curling downwards into an exaggerated pout. "Now Emma, that's not very polite. Come and let me take you into my lights. You won't grow old there. You'll remain the same *forever*," she says grinning. Although friendly, there's enough hint of malice beneath it to cause Emma's fear to skyrocket, coupling it with a burst of panic.

*No, this isn't normal. Fairies aren't real.*

Then, out of the corner of her vision, she spots something moving beside the fairy, something black. Possibly a rat or a mouse

A closer inspection shows it is neither, but some sort of...*thing*. The closest she could describe it as is a shadow, only solid. It danced along the edge until another appeared. And another. And another. Until what looked like a writhing bundle of obsidian tentacles begin to rise up from the well. Followed by veins of orange light creeping up along the grooves of the stones, pulsing and flickering.

"Come Emma. Come into my lights," the fairy intones as ebony webs begins to snake out of her eyes, cocooning around her head and neck, slithering down her thin frame.

The pulley above the well begins to swing as the monstrosity starts to lift out and towards Emma, now taking on the appearance of thick inky tar, the fairy vanishing within. The powerful scent of raw sewage fills the musty air as the orange light brightens the well as if there were a fiery lava pit deep below, painting its smoldering gleam along the stones.

The hairy phantom tentacles start to crawl towards Emma, the fear now escalating, almost making her numb with fright. A scream is wedged in her throat, she works her jaw, trying to utter a sound of alarm, her nails digging into Fred's soft fur.

"Emma!"

Agnes' voice jolts the little girl out of her stupor and she shrieks, whirling around to dash up the stairs, the slimy tentacles nipping at her ankles. As she reaches the top, her mother appears in the doorway. Emma almost knocks her down as she wraps her arms around her waist.

"My goodness, what-" Agnes begins, patting her daughter's trembling back.

"Down there! There's something there!" she stammers, turning and jabbing her finger downwards.

Only there's nothing there. Nothing at all. No sign of the strange yellow-orange light, that menacing fairy, or the black tentacles. The pulley now immobile. The horrid smell of sewage replaced with the mildewy scent of the basement.

As if nothing had even been there at all.

"There was something there..." Emma breathes, tightening her small arms around her mother. Agnes glances in the direction of the well. The whole basement was going to take some serious work, something she may not be up for. But Robert's enthusiasm was contagious.

"There was something coming out...and I thought I saw-"

*No I did see. There was a fairy, but you wouldn't believe that.*

"It's alright dear. That young man was only joking, I'm sure. Those ghost stories are just make-believe. Not anything real."

They'd spoken to a local youth who had informed them it was "the haunted house" in earshot of Emma, and it clearly had influenced her into 'seeing' something.

"What's the matter?" Robert appears beside Agnes, gazing down at his shaken daughter. "What is it?"

"That." Agnes, still holding Emma to her arms, gestures at the well. Robert smirks.

"That won't be a problem," he says. "We can take care of that."

"Mhm." Agnes arches her brows as she peers down at the unsightly area. It seems like more trouble than it's worth. But if he is convinced they could do it...

"Come on, I want to go see the owners, see if we can get this going." he announces as he gently maneuvers his wife and daughter away from the basement door. He takes one last glimpse as he shuts it.

Inside, just above the opening of the well, three tiny orange lights appear, hovering in a circular motion.

---

After the trip to the Muellers, and despite the fact that the snooty family looked down on circus performers, the house on Neibolt was now officially the new Gray residence.

Robert, inspired by the architecture of the churches they'd seen throughout Europe, went out and immediately bought a pair of stained glass windows from a local artist, painted with bright scenes of the circus. Once installed, they filled the room with rays of yellow, orange, blue and turquoise.

This was to be Emma's room, but the perceptive child was still frightened. Frightened and perplexed. Why did nobody live here? Why did the Mueller family not reside here? What of the family that did live here before? Cleaned up, it made for a lovely home. So, why was it just sitting here unattended to? Her young mind could not make sense of the questions her parents seemed unconcerned with.

No doubt, it was connected to whatever that was in the basement.

Snuggling Fred, she stares at the newly-installed windows, the design almost resembling a pair of wicked eyes grinning at her. The image of that fairy comes on. She shudders as the sound of the fairy's voice still plays in her mind.

*Come into my lights.*

In their new bedroom, Agnes was laying out her mother's large old quilt along the bed, featuring a scene of men herding cattle, women fetching water from a stark blue river and boys building haystacks. At

the foot of the bed sat a large cedar chest, inset with the initials R.G, where Robert kept his clown costume, made of fine off-white silk from Lyon, and his make-up supplies.

As he and Agnes prepare to perform, Robert, or rather Pennywise, stands looking at the full-length mirror. Adjusting the thick ruffle around his neck, he grins, his trademark red stripes thick along his cheeks, his lazy left eye slightly askew. As he stares, something rather curious happens. The kerosene lamp just behind him on the nightstand flickers, the tiny flame within breaking apart into three smaller flames, forming circles.

Seeing this odd movement in the reflection, Robert turns to look as the flame returns to normal. He approaches, taking the lamp in his large gloved hands, staring intently at the light as a small, barely-audible voice arises from its warmth.

*Robert.*

Dazed, he watches as the flame begins to break apart again, separating into the three tiny balls of orange-yellow as they begin to rotate. Robert's corneas begin to mirror their glow, the voice still speaking to him, whispering, before-

"Robert?"

Agnes is now beside him, her thin fingers caressing the puffy material of his shoulder.

"You okay?" she whispers, bringing her pink lips to his and planting a quick kiss.

"Fine," he replies as he places the kerosene lamp back down. "I'm fine."

---

Over the next few days, they perform a show in the afternoon and again at night, with Agnes doing her signature one-arm plange act, enthraling the audience who marveled at her grace and elegance. When the time came for Robert to do his dancing clown act, the children all squealed with delight as he did his gags, slapstick

comedy and dance moves where he engaged the children in the front rows. Adopting a slight lisp as part of his performance, he coaxed one little girl from the front to stand before him as he presented her with a large silver dollar from behind her ear. The girl looks positively enchanted.

The show concludes with the two African elephants, Sylvia and Thump performing and the lions Ivan and Maurice, jumping through hoops of fire.

Afterwards, the children all gathered around Pennywise to ask for an autograph or a special trick just for them, usually with him presenting them with candy or a small toy. One girl in particular, a redheaded child with a round freckled face hangs behind the other children, waiting for them to clear away, before she approaches the clown.

"Those kids do love you. They just flock right to you, don't they mister?" she says, smiling, displaying a minor gap between her two front teeth. Robert gazes down and chuckles.

"Kids love clowns. They bring happiness and joy. As P.T says; 'clowns and elephants are the pegs on which the circus is hung.' Did you like the elephants?"

"Oh, I did, but the you were the best part. The children all loved you." the little girl replies, fingering one of her braids.

"Well thank you. Now if you excuse me, I got to get going. My little girl is waiting." Robert gives a little wave as he walks towards his wagon where Agnes is waiting with Emma, smiling back at the girl, who returns the wave enthusiastically.

Agnes wraps her arms around his neck as he reaches her. "You were fantastic as always...um... who were you talking to just now?" she queries as Emma steps out the door of the wagon, looking relieved to see her father.

Of course this meant they'd be going back to that house.

To Neibolt.

"That little redheaded girl, she really loved my performance. She just thought the elephants were okay," he grins proudly as he pulls Agnes in for an affectionate hug. "You know, I'm gonna miss this. The crowds."

Agnes simply smiles weakly as she peers over his shoulder, her brows knotting together as she studies the area where she'd seen him engaged in a conversation outside the tent exit all by himself with nobody there but a wooden barrel.

---

Over the next few days, Robert starts to undergo a drastic personality change. His normally cheery upbeat demeanor became more somber, his words curt. He was short with both Agnes and Emma. His eyes underlined by dark half crescents. While he performed, he still saw that little redheaded girl in the bleachers, smiling and cheering. But it was on the second to last night that the circus would be in town that he saw something that made his blood run like ice rivers through his veins, his heart palpitate.

Tucked away in the back of the bleachers, standing with the girl, was Sven. Looking as he did the last Robert saw him. The shock sends Robert tumbling from a large ball on which he was balancing. The crowd responds with a chorus of gasps as Robert stands and shouts a phrase in Swedish that was incomprehensible to the spectator's ears.

Later that night, Agnes is woken up by the sound of the piano, the same sharp note over and over again. Groggily running her hand along Robert's side of the bed, feeling nothing but the cold sheets. Heading downstairs, she sees him sitting at the piano, hunched over, his right index stabbing at one single key repeatedly. He flinches as her fingers come up to brush along his back.

"Another nightmare?" she quietly asks, moving to sit alongside him on the small bench, tucking her blue silk nightgown around her knees.

"I keep thinking of him. Since we've been here. He's been on my mind. I don't know why." he replies, still poking at the key. Agnes reaches and grabs his hand in hers. He keeps his face down, obscured from the light of the kerosene lamp that sits atop the piano.

"Your father's gone. He's not here-"

"But he is. I saw him. Saw him in the bleachers tonight."

"What? How could-"

"He was *here*, Aggy, I saw him. And when I woke up just now. He was standing in the corner of the room staring at me," Robert pauses, before continuing under his breath. "I know it was him. He didn't have a head."

A much more ghastly image of Sven had appeared in the far corner of the bedroom, gripping his head by the scalp, blood dripping from the bloody stump of his neck, grinning maniacally.

Agnes rests her forehead upon Robert's shoulder, wrapping her arm around to massage his shoulder blades. She'd grown accustomed to his past occasionally showing its ugly head, as disturbing as it was, but this was merely a phase.

He then violently shakes her arm off.

"Get your ass back to bed. Stop bothering me." he sneers.

She pauses and stumbles up, her visage mixed with both surprise and hurt, even though this attitude has been present since they'd arrived.

"Robert, please just let me-"

"Just leave me alone!" he shouts as he smashes his fists against the piano keys. Agnes continues to back away as Emma, woken by her parents voices, appears at the bottom of the stairs with Fred in her arms, nuzzling him against her cheek.

"Mommy?" she says as Agnes rushes to her, guiding her back up the stairs.

"Come on, get back to bed." Agnes orders as Emma glances over her shoulder at her father, who has resumed his one-note playing as the flame of the lamp takes on the form of three rotating spheres.

Near him, a thick black mass hovers along the wall.

---

The last night of the circus was their largest crowd yet, with it nearly doubled from the last few days, most likely people from out of town or drifters who'd received the free tickets they'd given out. Both the crew and the performers were relieved, as things had not been right the moment they'd come to this town. Technical difficulties, the people getting into arguments in the bleachers. The animals, especially the lions, seemed agitated, pacing back and forth in their cages. Isaac was doing everything her could to keep the beasts calm and collected. Not an easy task with the roaring sounds of a raucous crowd.

Agnes stood on her platform, nearing the roof of the tent, the last night she would do so. Then the house on Neibolt would be their permanent home. The circus life left behind. Certainly a positive thing given the bad turn Robert was taking. She gazes down at Robert as Pennywise. He put on his clown face and performed his act with the gags and humor, but privately, he was different. Some shadow had overtaken him. Something she knew wasn't quite right.

Something to do with this town. That she felt. The people, the atmosphere. It was...*unsettling*. For reasons she couldn't comprehend. Perhaps settling down here *wasn't* the right decision.

Inhaling a deep breath, Agnes swings down from the platform, about to perform her final act when a loud 'snap' echos throughout the tent as the swivel that was holding the rope shatters. The audience gasps and screams in alarm as Agnes plummets to the ground.

Robert runs to her lifeless body laying in the center of the ring, cradling her in his arms, touching her cheek, feeling her heartbeat slowing.

"No, no...why?" he whimpers, before he turns his head up at the ceiling. "Why did you do this?!" he cries as the Ringmaster Norman Claude and the laborers watching from the sidelines dash over to aid.

Just outside, Ivan and Maurice are pacing impatiently in their metal cages. An invisible force opens the latch of each, the two lions pouncing out as Isaac shouts, taken by surprise by their sudden escape. The two large cats attack him, tearing out his throat before

turning their sights to the circus entrance, the chaotic sounds of the people drawing them in.

Nearby, a kerosene lamp atop a crate that a few laborers had been using tips over, the flame crawling towards the flap of the entrance.

Inside, the lions attack. Anyone and anything in their path. Tearing at clothing and flesh alike, the people screaming in confusion only fuels their bloodthirsty rampage. Outside in Agnes' wagon, Emma sits, hugging Fred to her as she sees through the small window the tent becoming engulfed in flames. The frantic spectators all knock each other down as they try to escape both the blaze and the lions.

Inside, Robert remains holding Agnes in his arms as the top of the tent starts to collapse as the fire engulfs it.

Emma stays sitting in the wagon, weeping as she hears the ensuing chaos, too frightened to move. Just as she decides to move to open the door, it bursts open, with her father standing before her.

Oddly calm.

"Daddy!" Emma runs into his arms, noting for one brief moment how cold his torso felt as she snakes her arms around him.

"Where's mommy?" Emma queries, tears cutting down her pink cheeks as she gazes up at her stone-faced father as he leads her away from the inferno, the lions now outside the burning tent, still attacking those that managed to escape from inside.

"Daddy, we can't leave mommy."

Robert halts, turning his head slowly to look down at his daughter. Emma stares back, eyes damp and red. There is a strange emptiness within his irises. She feels a chill travel along her spine as her heart drops to her stomach as they continue to stare at each other.

"Where's my daddy?" she asks in such a low intone that the words are barely even a whisper. She works her hand loose from his, still maintaining eye contact.

Robert only smiles calmly, derisively, his pupils taking on an orange

glow that matches the fire burning against the night sky. His mouth then opens, revealing three tiny balls of orange light.

"Come into my lights, Emma."

Emma's eyes cloud over as her stuffed lion drops from her fingers.

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It's only a few weeks later that the horror of the fire is forgotten. The death toll is said to be in the hundreds, however, the exact number is unknown.

Decades later, while reading about the great circus fire of 1881, Mike Hanlon comes across a black and white photo of a tall clown, standing before a wagon, painted along its sides is 'Pennywise The Dancing Clown.'

Beside him is a little brunette girl, holding a stuffed lion, a bright smile across her face.

## 7. Stanley Uris

### Stanley Uris-1988

Stanley Uris was not one to procrastinate. Upon arriving home and placing his backpack neatly upon his desk chair, he snatched up his small black binoculars, sitting in the place they always were, right between a small lamp and a wooden pencil box etched with various species of birds. He was wearing his brown winter coat with the tan ducks printed on it that his mother had given him along with a navy blue scarf and mittens. The temperature was below freezing and Derry was a wintry wonderland, blanketed in snow and ice crystals hanging from the roof of the homes. Andrea Uris had begun a routine of breaking the icicles above their porch with a hammer, so as to lessen the danger of them falling and causing serious harm to any member of the Uris family. Their neighbors should do the same, she'd told her son.

"But they won't," she'd said with a disapproving shake of her head. "No common sense, those folks."

The holidays were around the corner, but the looming threat that had quietly been terrorizing the town-the horrific child murders-was putting a damper on any merriment, even with Christmas vacation approaching. Bill, whose little brother Georgie had vanished, Richie and Eddie had simply gone their separate ways after school let out. Eddie's mother had insisted he stay indoors due to the weather and Bill's morose attitude didn't make for much fun in terms of any activities they could do.

Stan was still rattled from his passing encounter with the Bower's Gang, who'd suddenly taken to calling him "Stanley Urine." The ducks splashed across the knitted fabric of his jacket made for a good source of ridicule as well. He'd rushed past them and jumped on his bike as they pointed and laughed and made a sharp beeline home. Their cackling shrinking in the distance as he neared his destination.

He stuffed his bird book in his backpack after removing his school books. He coasted through town on his bike towards the Barrens. Parking it under the Kissing Bridge, he took his bird book in hand,

binoculars strung around his neck. As his boots sloshed through the crystalized blades of grass along the frozen waters of the Kenduskeag, he thought of the Black-capped Chickadee. It was widely considered an unremarkable bird to many, but it was one of his favorites due to its super-power-like abilities; it could grow its hippocampus in order to increase memory, control its body temperatures, preserving their energy by going into regulated hypothermia overnight. They were to Stan, admirable creatures capable of surviving the worst conditions.

The curfew was in place, so he would only stay an hour. Just an hour before the sunlight begins to drain from the sky and the temperatures plummet even further. Ample time to just sit and view his favorite bird. He wanted to at least enjoy this serene moment of observing. It was calming.

Crouching down in the grass, the spot in which he knew the bird was abundant, he places his book beside him and brought his binoculars to his eye sockets as he immediately spots it balancing on a twig protruding from from a nearby bush. Just as he's focusing in on it, his eardrum pricks at a sound. Subtle. Had it not been so quiet, he may not have heard it at all.

It sounded like crunching, mixed with squishing noises. Like an animal gnawing on a fresh kill.

A black bear maybe. Not a wolf, as there are none in Maine. A coyote is another possibility.

Charily, Stan rises up, casting his gaze along the Barrens, shading his eyes with his left palm from the bit of sunlight shredding through the overcast. He stands for a moment, blinking, staring, before he heads in the direction of the peculiar sound, his chest fluttering with anxiety. Something was drawing him near, even though normally his instinct would be to run. But the need to see whatever it is making these sounds was forcing him to go against it.

Certainly not like him. A bit jarring.

His breath was visible in the chilled air, billowing out from his lips as he edges closer to a small boulder along the side of a thick tree.

The noise was just below, in a short drop off within a cluster of small boulders.

He places his hands along the cold surface of one of the boulders, his breathing increasing, those clouds of chilled white still bursting from his mouth. He peers over.

At first he sees only a splotch of dark red stark against the sparse snow. It takes a few seconds before he sees something moving in the center of it.

A coyote. A massive one. Blinding white fur that acted as a camouflage against the snow. Its shoulders shaking as it gnaws ferociously on a limb. From his perspective, Stan could tell it was an arm from what appeared to be a small child. It must have discovered another murder victim left in the Barrens before the police did.

Stan clamps his palm to his mouth as he gags, the scent of the fresh blood being carried up to him along the minor breeze. This causes the beast to look up, snout smeared with crimson which trailed up in thin ribbons through striking golden eyes. Stan stays deathly still, heartbeat thumping in his throat, mouth drying, gazing down as he and the beast make eye contact.

Observant child that he is, Stan took a few seconds to note that this coyote was abnormally large, almost wolf-like in its appearance with a short snout and rounded ears.

But there are no wolves in Maine. He was certain of that. This one must have taken a wrong turn.

Just as Stan finds the courage to begin to move backwards, a deep throaty growl emits from the beast, the sheen of the blood stains along its teeth now visible as its steel visage transforms into a more predatory one.

With this clear show of aggression, Stan takes off. Rushing in the direction where he'd left his bird book.

Wolves weren't supposed to attack people. At least, that's what he'd heard. What he'd read.

But this one certainly looks ready to.

He could hear the beast's massive paws climbing up along the rocks, making its way towards him, oddly silent. Grabbing up his beloved bird book-there was no way he could leave it-he suddenly halts, gazing back over this shoulder.

*What are you doing? Keep going. Don't stop.*

But he stays put, the strange wolf nowhere to be found. He was sure it had started after him. He'd heard its bulking frame breaking through twigs and branches as it was climbing up towards the top of the boulder.

And was it even a *wolf*?

There are no wolf packs in Maine. That was a fact. This one should not even be here.

But here it was. Right as he arrived.

What was the possibility of that? The lone wolf in Maine showing up here, just as he arrived to just quietly look at his favorite bird?

Sniffing, he heads towards the dirt path that leads from the Barrens, the Kissing Bridge coming into his view, his bike sitting in wait, as he rounds a clump of low-hanging branches, he sees it; the white wolf, standing about fifteen feet away. The sneaky thing had decided to circle him covertly.

And was standing right in front of his bike.

A clear sign of extreme intelligence. Also very jarring.

"Okay buddy, easy now." Stan pants as his breath catches as he holds up his bird book defensively, peering over the cover as they engage in a staring contest. It's here that he sees how enormous the beast is; the size of a cow at least. The unusual pattern of blood coursing along its face was still bright and visible.

*Maybe it doesn't want to hurt me. Maybe.*

Just as quickly as he ended that optimistic thought, the wolf comes at him, snarling lips curling back, its incisors looking strangely more pointed-more like yellowed quills. Stan lets out a barely-there yelp as he sprinted back along the path, trying not to slip along the sleek ice, sharp rocks and broken branches. His heart is thundering against his chest, and even in this icy weather, sweat was starting to bead along his forehead as he tightens his grip on his book. The soles of his feet were heavy, his knees weakening, growing tired.

He keeps running along the embankment, nearly tripping several times until he reaches an overturned tree, stopping, despite himself, near a web of underbrush. The only sound in the quiet was his labored panting, the coldness of the winter air filling his lungs.

Hand to his chest, he peers around.

The white wolf is gone again.

It was toying with him for certain. But not that he sensed was in any way playful. No, this was like a lion stalking an antelope, just before the big kill. Just like in the nature shows he watched. There was something else going on here. The behavior of this animal was not like a wolf. They weren't *supposed* to attack people. They were not *supposed* to even be in Maine.

That coupled with the unexpectedness of this encounter, this interruption of what was *supposed* to be his quiet solitude, his escape from the consuming stress of school, home and the likes of the Bower's Gang, was enough to cause him to collapse to the ground, near a large rotting hollow log, partly hidden beneath the snow. He leaned his hand on it, his book slipping from his trembling fingers.

As his breathing slows, he gazes over to the bridge, his bike seeming both close and far away all at once.

Then, a crackle of twigs. Soft, but audible.

Stan tenses, sucking in a sharp breath. He gingerly turns his head, brown eyes cast over his shoulder, seeing a clump of white within a pair of oaks, moving furtively along the tree trunks.

Moving quickly, Stan makes a play for the end of the hollowed out log, stuffing his book in first, before managing to squeeze the rest of his small frame inside, made thicker by his warm clothing, the printed ducks along his coat smearing with a combination of snow and damp dirt.

Dirty. He was *dirty*. Relegated to crawling inside a filthy log, his new coat stained, pants soiled with the wet of the snow. His mother would be irate. And for the first time, since this encounter began, he felt irritation. Irritation tinged with the fear still present.

This was *offensive*. How dare this beast that's not supposed to be even be here force him into this situation.

The fear was nothing compared to the offensiveness.

He swiftly reaches his hand out the other end of the log, unearthing a large pointy stick embedded in the snow. He waits as he hears the offensive wolf creature circle the log, listening as it loudly sniffs the air. It appears at the end where Stan's feet are only inches from the splintered entrance.

Without warning, it begins trying to shove its snout in, making attempts to nip at Stan's shoes.

"Hey! Stop it!" Stan shouts, barely able to even move in the cramped space, unable to turn his head to see what the creature's next move will be. "Stop it!"

The log jerks violently as the wolf tries to shove its enormous head inside.

"No!" Stan bellows. "Don't! Stop!"

The jerking movements abruptly cease as the wolf finds its fruitless to enter. Growling quietly, it slinks to the other end, where Stan can see it more clearly.

They are now vis-à-vis, and Stan feels a stark chill pulsate along his spine as he looks into the wolf's irises.

They were almost glowing. Like two luminous golden moons against

the snowy backdrop. The dark red stripes along its mouth he could now see more clearly; not blood, but deep red fur. Its teeth resembled that of a shark than a common wolf. Almost hypnotized, Stan's wide eyes keep fixed on the beast's strange characteristics, his tiny hands still grasping the pointed stick.

And then it lunges, the golden lights of its pupils blurring as its shark-teeth come for him, trying to once again squeeze inside. In that second, Stan's trance is broken, and he thrusts the stick forward, powerfully, with as much force as he could muster with the little energy he had left.

The pointed end meets the wolf. It yelps, shrinking back. The beast continues its pained whimpering as it violently shakes its head, and that's when Stan realizes the stick is no longer in his hand, but lodged in the roof of the wolf's mouth. Blood peppers along the snow as it paws at its teeth, spinning, attempting to remove it.

After a few moments of this tortured dance, it gives Stan one final glare coupled with a roar as it sprints along the shadowy oaks, vanishing along the thick brush. A quiet then falls over Stan, he rests his head along the bottom of the dirty log, not daring to move. His raspy breaths become serene and relieved, his body now frozen, as he slips into a brief slumber, one filled with images of roses with glowing centers that almost resemble the wolf's mesmerizing eyes, a night sky sparkling with stars in the pattern of a large buffalo. A cool breeze touching the delicate petals of the roses as they begin an angelic crooning. And for a split second, he glimpses a tower black against the sky.

And with that, he suddenly awakens. His body doing the jerking motion one does when you are between sleep and awake. Hypnagogic jerk it was called. Just outside a small crack in the wood of the log, he sees movement. But this is something much tinier and less threatening.

Squeezing out the log, he sees a Black-capped Chickadee, hopping along the wood. He regards it a moment with a small weak smile, before he quickly makes his way to the bridge where his bike is parked and swiftly heads home. The sunlight now almost completely diminished, save for a soft orange tinting the clouds beyond the

distant mountains.

That night, he's berated and grounded by his parents for soiling his new clothes and for staying out past curfew.

"You could have been killed," Andrea had said, nostrils flared, evidence she was especially incensed. "Do you know how much distress you caused?" His father merely stood by, a somber disappointment resting upon his features.

Stan's thoughts are drowning out her harangue, her voice becoming muffled, like his ears were submerged in water. His encounter with the large wolf with the red striped fur and radiant eyes still lingering. But had it been real? Or was it simply a dream? He had, after all, briefly dozed off in that disgusting log, so maybe it had been. The other things he'd seen in his dream; the roses, the stars, the tower. Yes, the wolf had to be a part of that.

By the following morning, he's convinced himself that it was maybe just some sleep-related hallucination. He'd read about that. That massive hulking beast could not have been. It simply couldn't have been real.

After all, there are no wolves in Maine.

## **8. Christie, Liam and Josh**

### **Christie, Liam and Josh-1988**

"C'mon, get these," Liam orders as he tosses a bundle of white taper candles and holders at Josh, who fumbles as he catches them. "These will have to do. I ain't driving down to Bangor now. And these are the only ones they got."

They were in the candles and fragrance section of Rite-Aid. Standing beside them is Josh's younger sister Christie, decked out in a dark green crop top, denim jacket and skirt, chewing loudly on Skittles candies she boldly ripped open in front of a store employee sweeping the floor. The gangly young man had simply shrugged and kept moving along the aisle, pushing the wrinkled scraps of wrappers and dirt crumbs along the stained and scratched cream tiles.

It was Halloween night, and everyone else was out trick or treating or partying, so the store was almost empty.

"Shouldn't we use black candles? That's what they usually use, right?" Christie pipes up, tucking a tendril of wavy blonde behind her ear.

"They don't have them here, and I don't think we need them." Josh replies as a spiked-haired young man with a septum piercing and cartoonish-looking tattoos emerges from the snacks aisle with three bags of pretzels piled high in his arms.

"Someone's gettin' high tonight." Liam mutters, wiping his nose with the sleeve of his leather jacket as they watch the young man pay the cashier and exit.

"Hey where's Lucas?" Josh queries. "Thought he was coming?"

"Stuck at his girlfriend's. She goes to church and all that and thinks we're all a bunch of heathens." Liam grins, his neck-length greasy hair tumbling over his dark sunken eyes as he continues to scan the shelf, before blowing a sigh through his nostrils.

"Hope he don't make that uptight bitch my sister-in-law. Would hate

to see her every fucking holiday," he pauses. "Yeah, we're done here." he announces as he gives a quick flick of his hand, scarred with cigarette burns, motioning for Josh and Christie to follow him.

As a song by New Kids On The Block starts blaring over the store speakers, Liam sends a taunting grin at Christie as he begins a comical flailing of his limbs in the aisle, weaving his lanky frame, trying to mimic the dance moves of the boy banders.

"Hey, I'm Joey McIntyre. Ain't you into them Christie?" he says as he starts to snap his fingers as he does a shuffle up to her. With a disgusted visage, Christie sticks her palm out, blocking him from coming closer.

"God no," she says, her face looking as if she'd just taken a whiff of the worst-smelling garbage imaginable. "Fucking Greta Keene listens to that shit. Not me."

Greta had taken to hanging out front of Derry Middle School, waiting for Christie, and along with Sally Mueller, started chucking rolled up paper balls, juice boxes and empty soda cans at her as she passed by. She'd been a target since she'd walked in on them tormenting a girl named Beverly Marsh and promptly cussed them out. They then began targeting her. It had become a ritual at this point.

Liam halts his dancing, his mien dropping to a more serious one. "C'mon man." he says, sniffing loudly, running his left index along the thin black mustache that aged him at least ten years. He didn't look like a young man of eighteen, but rather a thirty year old you might see working Derry's seedy bar scene. Compared to Josh's more boyish, youthful appearance with his short dirty blonde hair, stonewashed jeans and Derry High School jacket, they made an odd match in terms of friends.

The young cashier looks nervous as the three approach, with Liam digging into the back pocket of his trousers, presenting some wrinkled up dollar bills and loose change.

"Hey, got money tonight man," Liam gives a leering grin to the cashier, whose cheeks are now flushed a light pink. He nods rapidly as he quickly takes the money from Liam, snatching it from his palm

as if worried he might contract a disease by touch.

"See ya'," Liam continues his lurid grinning as he makes a finger gun with his hand, pointing it at the timid cashier, clicking his tongue. "Later dude."

After all three pile into Liam's red Pontiac Firebird, Josh tosses the plastic bag of candles into the backseat beside Christie. As they cruise along Kansas Street. Josh snaps on the radio, with Liam loudly belting out the lyrics as Josh cranks up the volume.

"You're motoring, what's your price for flight, in finding mister right, you'll be alright tonight!" he sings in an deep, exaggerated intonation, sending glances back at Christie over his shoulder. She loudly groans as she slinks down against the backseat.

"*Why* do you always have to be *such* a dick?" she sighs as she gazes out at the street lights blurring past. She huffs, folding her arms as he continues his taunting crooning, turning in his seat to face her, placing a hand dramatically over his heart.

"Babe, you know, you're growing up so fast, and mama's worrying-"

"No she ain't." Christie sternly cuts in, pushing the plastic bag aside as she shuffles in her seat, kicking the empty beer cans along the tacky floor with the toe of her sneakers. The odor inside the car nauseating her with what she suspected was a combination of weed and vomit.

They pass by a bar with patrons loitering outside. She points.

"Ma is probably in there."

Their mother Melanie certainly wasn't worrying about anything or anyone other than her next lay.

"I hate that fucking song." she adds.

Liam abruptly stops his warbling as they come to a stop in front of their destination; 29 Neibolt Street.

"Ah, fuck yeah!" Liam hits the breaks and leaps out, making his way to the trunk. Throwing it open, he removes a large heavy item,

wrapped in a grimey brown cloth, along with a couple of flashlights. Slamming the hood, he approaches Josh and Christie.

"Here it is. It's big enough. We're gonna do this, man. And it's gonna be fuckin' cool!" he exclaims excitedly as he pounces towards the front door of the run-down mansion, long rumored to be a haven for every tweaker in town.

As well as ghosts and the occasional Satanist-a crowd that Liam ran with. It was his idea to come to the most infamous house in Derry to perform a seance. They'd let Christie tag along for the ride.

As Josh duly follows. Christie pauses, holding the plastic bag of candles, staring up at the circular attic window. She remains there, her hazel disks focused on the tenebrous just within the foggy and cracked glass.

She gazes over at the police tape draped along the wrought iron fence that had been torn, a sign that others had trespassed along the property.

"What a shithole." she mumbles beneath her breath.

A pair of large hands violently shove her forward. She nearly falls over, catching herself against the wooden beam of the porch, feeling a pinch against her thumb as a splinter pricks her skin.

"Ow, shit." she gasps as she whirls around, certain that asshole Liam or Josh were pranking her.

But no one.

She quickly runs inside, trying to work the splinter from her flesh, a tear of red blood forms, pushing it out.

"Someone just pushed me," she says as she shuts the rickety old door behind her, trading her gaze between her brother and his friend, trying to decide who was the culprit. She drops the plastic bag to her feet as she snatches up a flashlight, shining it on her finger.

"Maybe it was the ghost!" Liam cackles, his jeering grin a hint that maybe it had been him. Christie glowers at him.

"It's not funny. Someone came up behind me-"

"You just tripped," Josh interjects dismissively. "We were both in here. Liam was with me."

"Yeah," Liam agrees as he switches on his flashlight, aiming it at his face. "I told, you it was the ghost. This place is haunted like a motherfucker. You know by that piano teacher."

"Edna Cotton?" Josh inquires.

"Yep, lived here around 1906," Liam continues, "She was banging Joseph Mueller. He wouldn't leave his wife. So, one day, she invited his wife here for tea- and the wife had no clue about the affair- and then she crept up behind her with an axe and pow!" he swings his arms as if holding an invisible weapon. "Blade went into the back of wifey's skull. They found Edna wondering the streets afterwards, covered in blood. They hanged her a week later. They had to do it quick, since they were afraid the Mueller wife's family and friends would get to her first. "

"Wow." Christie says, her arms scissored around her, feeling a stark chill suddenly pulse through her, goosebumps prickling along her skin. The mention of the Mueller name made her think of Sally.

She glances to the front door.

No, no ghost. Just Liam being a douchbag and trying to scare her. Maybe she did trip. Pushing it out of her mind, she moves to stand by Josh.

"Alright, let's do this," Liam positions himself before the cloaked item, yanking away the material to reveal a large oval-shaped mirror. He traces a callused fingertip along its golden frame. "Mirrors are portals. Gateways."

Josh snatches up the bag of candles and pulls out his lighter, igniting each and lining them up around the mirror. Christie lowers herself to sit on the icy floor.

"Think this will work huh?" Josh queries as he stares at his reflection. Liam nods, keeping his eyes glued to his own.

"Legend has it The Brotherhood of Nineteen used to hold seances here," Liam says. "They also used to do mirror gazing, trying to contact the dead. I read one of them went crazy after he stared at a mirror too long and his reflection morphed into something inhuman, a demonic pigman or something. Now close your eyes."

Liam starts to recite an incantation under his breath, but neither Josh nor Christie can decipher what he's saying. The room is quiet, dark, save for the soft light of the candles.

Christie decides to peek, opening her lids and watching, eyes widening as she sees a pitch black fog that resembles liquid start to spread along the mirror, drowning out their reflections. She inhales sharply at the unexpected sight.

The black fog quickly vanishes as she does so. Liam growls, "Hey what the fuck?"

"I saw something. In the mirror-"

"It was working? Dammit! Don't fuckin' talk! Shit!" Liam hisses as he gives her a murderous glare. Josh places a hand on Christie's shoulder.

"It's okay. Just keep them closed." he offers gently as Liam keeps his intense brown irises on her.

"Again." he states coldly as he turns back to face the mirror, and, once again, recites that indiscernable invocation. Christie keeps her lids squeezed shut. For a moment she heeds Liam's order. But something was telling her to open them again. A tension begins to envelope her tiny frame, her chest tightening, heart thumping against the tightness forming in her throat.

And she looks.

What she sees is not an inky fog cloud this time, but...a clown. Clear as day. His round face outlined by the golden of the candlelight. His pupils two flaming smooth yellow rings. His grin is trimmed in dark red stripes that cut across his white cheeks. The most startling thing of all are his teeth; sharp and pointy, like a demon out of the horror

movies.

"Oh my God!" Christie shrieks as she scrambles away on her hands and knees, coming to a stop near the staircase.

"Fucking Hell!" Liam roars as he bolts up. "You can't take her anywhere! Fuck!"

"What is it?" Josh crawls over to his terrified sister, her gaze on the mirror, bottom lip trembling as she leans her weight against her palms. The weird clown face has vanished from the glass.

"There was something in the mirror. A *face* in the mirror. Like...a clown's face." Christie breathes, her voice dripping with panic, her chest heaving rapidly. Liam gives a disgusted scoff, his hands on his hips as he hangs his head, shaking it.

"Can't bring her anywhere," he grumbles. "A fucking clown? What the fuck even?"

*Wham! Wham! Wham!*

A pounding starts from beneath the floor. Continuous, growing louder. More ominous. Even Liam looks startled at this. Josh eyes the floorboards, eyebrows knotted as he wraps an arm around Christie.

"Sounds like it's coming from the basement." he offers.

"Gee, ya' think so huh?" Liam states sarcastically as he stares downwards for a fleeting moment before he grabs up a flashlight and storms towards the kitchen in the direction of the basement door. "Probably some fuckin' crackhead. If it is, they're going to get their ass beat. I'm not in the mood for this shit."

Josh follows, with Christie close behind, her finger clasp the hem of Josh's black and orange high school jacket. Liam and Josh both charge down the basement steps, flashlight beams searching along the dusty warped steps. They both pause halfway down to glance at the darkness, a runnel of moonlight is cutting through the cracked and stained basement window.

"Who the fuck is here man?" Liam shouts as he keeps the light

pointedly on the well, holding his forearm against the lower half of his face to shield against the odor of rotting wood. There is no answer, only the aged pulley that dangles over the well entrance begins to squeak as it swings, ever so slightly.

"What is-" Josh begins before he's cut off by the basement door slamming. He and and Liam bolt back up the steps.

"Hey Christie, the fuck you doing? Open it," Josh pounds on the door. "Hey! Open!"

Then, in between flesh striking the wood, they hear it. A loud bubbling growl emitting from the dark of the basement corner. Josh halts his pounding as he and Liam both turn their attention on the well.

Rising up from beneath is a creature, humanoid in appearance, save for its face. Its features were only somewhat visible in the dim light of the room. The blue-white moonlight gleamed along the tusks protruding out from its snarled and twisted mouth. It gave another growl, a snarl mixed with a squeal.

Like a pig. Its eyes were like two burning balls above its snout, devoid of any pupils, pointedly on both of them. The odd ruby stripes down its cheeks distort as it continues to snarl.

"Shit, the fuck is that?" Josh manages, grabbing Liam's elbow. The young man remains frozen, seemingly hypnotized by the creature's blazing corneas. Josh violently shoves him aside to resume frantically banging on the door.

"Christie! Open it! There's something fuckin' in here man! Open it!" he shouts, not removing his sight from the pig-like monster. *"Fuckin' open you little bitch!"*

Suddenly, the beast is behind them, moving with lightning speed at the bottom of the steps. Liam screams as it yanks him down by the ankles, he flails backwards, landing with a loud thud and a groan.

The beast then speedily leaps up and tackles Josh, the front of his skull cracks against the door. He falls to the ground, with the beast's

demonic swine features becoming more blurry as he's rendered barely concious, he feels the bopping of his head along the steps as he is dragged down the stairs.

"Hello, goodbye." the monster growls before it tears into Josh's throat, with Liam still knocked cold beside him.

Outside the door, Christie is staring blankly at it, hearing nothing. Just a stark silence. Her mind is hollow. Numb.

*Christie.*

A maniacal giggle follows.

*Christie.*

Another giggle.

She slowly turns around, looking up to the second floor balcony. Without giving much thought to what she was doing, she saunters up the steps, still hearing a soft insidious giggling amid the creaks of her soles along the wood. She comes to a halt in front of an open door to a room filled with clown dolls.

In the corner is a dark-haired woman seated on a rocking chair, facing the stained glass windows. On her lap, one of the clown dolls wearing a yellow and blue outfit, with orange pom poms down its front. Its large eyes were turned downwards, and for a fleeting moment, Christie could swear she sees it blink.

"He said he loved me." the woman offers quietly. Christie sucks in a deep breath, her mouth becoming dry, a thump thickens in her throat. Her heart races against her rib cage.

"Who?" Christie squeaks as the woman suddenly turns to look at her. Christie's heart now feels as if it could stop beating completely at the sight she sees.

The woman's face is but a half-skeleton, bits of flesh dangling from her chin, her eyelids non-existent, leaving her bloodshot eyeballs exposed like two small moons. Her irises like black holes. As she rises, the front of her dress comes into view, caked in dark dried

blood.

*"He said he wanted me!"* she screams as she presents an axe, splattered with blood streaks. Christie screams hysterically, falling against the door as the woman comes at her. The giggling starts again, and Christie, to her utter shock and horror watches as the clown doll that was sitting on the woman's lap becomes animated, moving on its own. It painted features now drawn into an evil glare.

All the dolls in the room were moving, waving their hands and giggling. A chorus of laughter chases after Christie as she takes off down the hallway, the insane woman following behind. She can hear the axe cutting through the chilly air as the woman swings it at her, barely missing Christie's back.

She bounds down the stairs, almost stumbling, grasping the shoddy railing, cobwebs catching along her fingers. She runs to the front door, jiggling the handle, finding it stuck-or locked.

There's no time to comprehend which, the crazed woman is coming for her. Only now, she has red stripes down her cheeks along the rotted flesh and bone. Christie dodges the swinging axe, making a play back up the stairwell. Still in shock, she holds in another scream, concentrating on finding refuge, running inside a room with a large leather chair, desk with a single lamp that was aglow, vintage record player and coffee table.

Inside, after she has closed the door and locked it. She stands, tears coursing down her beet red cheeks, a headache throbbing through her skull. Her whole body is trembling uncontrollably as she sinks to the floor, holding her knees, rocking.

If she could get to Josh. Or even asshole Liam would do.

Somebody. Anybody.

She remains in the same position for a few minutes, sniffing, tense, as she keeps her attention on the door, until she hears a crackling sound as the old dusty record player begins to play;

*'You're motoring, what's your price for flight, in finding mister right, you'll*

*be alright tonight.'*

When the verse plays a second time, the needle begins skipping, the phrase, "What's your price" repeating on a loop. Christie tightly covers her ears, tucking her head down.

*"What's your price?" the man in the red truck asks Melanie, whose leaning against the door. They're in the driveway of Melanie's house, and it's just after midnight.*

*"Whatever you got-" Melanie says in between her loud gum chewing. The man then nods behind her.*

*"Hey, we got company." he mutters. Melanie turns to see Christie in her pale lavender nightgown, clutching her Raggedy Ann doll.*

*"Mommy...?"*

*"Get your ass back in bed!" Melanie roars as she stalks towards her, pushing her up the porch steps.*

Christie darts up, screaming as she runs at the record player, knocking it to the ground, stomping the shiny black of the record, smashing and cracking it. She continues to angrily pummel it with her soles, kicking the pieces aside. Her fury does nothing to drown out the forest of giggles she hears as she does so.

"Who is there?" she asks forcefully, feeling a new strength come over her. Her anger, her fear, were now collidng, blending, erupting in a powerful adrenaline rush.

She was done with this crap.

"Who the fuck are you?! Where's my brother, you fuckers?!"

The voices quiet, hushing each other, trying to hold in their mocking cackling. The room is dark save for the tiny lamp, and the only thing she can make out are the feet of her assailants moving stealthily along the shadows of the corners of the room. Charily, they begin to present themselves, each clown doll stepping forward, each one differnt than the last, tall, short, inching out into the weak light. Their giggling starts up again.

"No," Christie gives a small shake of her head. "No, this isn't real. You're just a dream. You're the pizza and ice cream I gorged on last night. I must have fallen asleep in the car. Because this isn't real."

This instantly silences them. They all glance to each other, their worn and aged features almost looking...scared. Or worried.

"I wouldn't say that. You'll make him mad..." offers the one who was perched on the lap of the crazed woman with the axe.

She wasn't real either. Just a ghost. A junk food-induced hallucination.

Christie, the emotionally intelligent girl that she is, now decided to wield her new power.

"You're not real. You're not fucking real." she points a taunting finger. "You're just imaginary. Just stupid dolls. I'm not scared of fucking dolls!" she finishes, almost laughing as she brings her fingers up to her mouth.

The room then starts to rumble, like an earthquake. The dolls all clamor back to the shadows, seemingly disappearing into the ratted and torn wallpaper. One utters an audible, "Uh-oh," as they vanish from sight. Accompanying the thunderous shaking is a raspy roar, echoing around Christie as she runs to the room's door, flinging it open, instantly being met with the axe woman.

"You're not real!" Christie shouts defiantly, the woman shrinks back, lowering her axe. Christie takes the opportunity to then jump down the stairs, the edge of her sneaker catching on a piece of broken railing that is protruding from a step and tumbles, flying down the stairwell, landing at the bottom and rolling to the center of the living room. She remains there, until she opens her lids, feeling the warmth of the sun upon her color drained features. She gradually raises her head, before she pushes herself up and heads to the door. Stepping out in the brightness of daylight, embracing the warmth, she makes her way home, just a block away.

Standing in the bathroom of her bedroom, she observes her tired features.

*It had been a dream. A very vivid one. But a dream nonetheless.*

Josh and Liam had left her there clearly, not that Josh hadn't abandoned her before. He would normally not have done that, but Liam's influence was strong. Maybe when she passed out during that silly little seance Liam wanted to do. Or maybe in the car ride. But, didn't she see something? She could have sworn she did. In the mirror. Or was that part of the dream too?

Oh well. Whatever happened, she was home now. Josh would turn up sooner or later. He was probably off smoking weed with Liam.

Assholes. Both of them.

She switches on the tap, gently splashing her face with cold water. She opens the medicine cabinet to retrieve the aspirin. She shuts it, and in the reflection, standing right behind her are Josh and Liam. She screams as she takes in their bloody and chewed facial features, Liam grinning his mocking leering grin. Just as the aspirin bottle hits the floor, she jolts awake.

Awake. Cold. Head pounding as she lay on the floor of Neibolt at the bottom of the stairs. She groggily lifts her aching body up, moaning in pain, placing her palm to her forehead. She lets out a defeated whimper as she sits, gazing around as the oval mirror that still sat leaning against the wall begins to roll out in front of her. Christie gasps, keeping her eyes on it as it comes to a halt a few feet away from her. Her heavy breathing is audible as she stares at it.

The surface of the mirror begins to ripple, her reflection fading as a massive white gloved hand emerges from the watery silver, wiry fingers wiggling, deep, rasping chuckles drifting out along with it as the ruffled sleeve of the hand appears. Then a bulbous head topped with fiery orange tufts of hair. Christie's mouth is agape, her eyes bulged as she tries to inch away from Pennywise, who has now pulled his entire upper torso out of the mirror, bells jingling. Leaning on his fists, he grins, those familiar stripes distorting as he sneers,

"Time to float," he growls before his features darken. "You are scared now, aren't you?" he loudly sniffs the air. "Yes, you are. Real, delectable fear."

He crawls out a little further, his visage becoming more irate, saliva strings dangling from his lips. "What a shithole." he says, mimicking Christie's voice.

Crippled with fear, Christie begins to scoot away, a tearful grimace forming, her legs kicking along the floor, before Pennywise's hand shoots out, coiling around her ankle.

Christie shrieks as he drags her towards him as he retreats back into the mirror. With a flash of light, the surface is normal again, save for a few small orange electric bolts shivering along the glass.

As the mirror tips back over, the faint sounds of giggling begins, filling the rooms of the house.